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**FORTUNA CHANCE**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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LONDON

# FORTUNA CHANCE

BY  
JAMES PRIOR

AUTHOR OF  
A WALKING GENTLEMAN, 'FOREST FOLK,' 'HYSSOP,'  
ETC.

*Vidrix vel Vindex Fortuna*

LONDON  
CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.

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# FORTUNA CHANCE

## CHAPTER I

### MISCHANCE

IN the autumn of 1725 the gossips of Buxton and in their turn the consummate quidnuncs of London society made a nine-days' cackle over a disgrace which had befallen a lady of the highly connected family of the Chances; wherein what she lost in reputation Beau Vane gained, with his almost impromptu transmutation by his wit's alchemy of Miss Chance into mischance. That "miss" had still a flavour about it of the infantine, the pert, the familiar, the contemptuous, the common; therefore to persons with the Georgian fine sense of the moral difference between sin and discovery the public curtailment of the full honourable title of "mistress" was a measure of the lady's descent.

Of course there were and are Chances in almost every county in England, but Fortuna Chance, the Miss or Mistress Chance in question, was of the Roman Catholic Chances of the Peak country whose ladies always patched their faces on the Tory side. That elder branch I mean, which has for its sonorous motto "*Victrix vel Vindex Fortuna*"; the younger and perhaps now better regarded advances the trivial flippancy of "*Cross or Pile*," equivalent in modern currency to "*Heads or Tails*." The other, the gentlemanly ingredient in the scandal, was a young fellow of the even greater tribe of Nobodies of Nowhere, a very pretty young fellow too, but of low family, small fortune and Whiggish politics. An act of mere immorality might

easily have been condoned by miss's kinsfolk, but so gross a misalliance, whether legalized or irregular, was universally condemned as against all form. The lover was compelled to a desperate duel with Fortuna's brother George, in which he both gave and received serious wounds; nevertheless his inconspicuous name of Bond would inevitably have been soon forgotten but for his subsequent remarkable success in his profession of the law. It would appear that blood-letting had cured him of his inclination towards a life of pleasure and the vanity of embroidered coats or pink-coloured top-knots, for on his recovery he devoted himself to the more serious frivolities of ambition, went the western circuit assiduously, wrote a book on the law of implied contracts, got into parliament, and became memorable later on as the youngest judge who ever resigned his seat on the English bench.

While he shone she suffered eclipse, total, permanent. She had put on a wedding-ring, and without iteration affirmed a marriage, possibly with truth; until Lord Hardwicke's reforming act a generation later marriage was the loosest institution in the State. But it is to be remarked that she gave no proof, attempted no persuasion, made no appeal, raised no outcry, shed no tear, as women rightly do who have or would appear to have right on their side. She may be said to have consented to her lover's neglect; she certainly did not complain of it.

Her father and mother were dead, she was of age, and she refused to defer to the superiority which seniority, immaculate virtue, masculinity or even to that which muscularity gave one or other of her relatives. She disobeyed their humane fiat consigning her to seclusion with a distant kinswoman; she accepted, even anticipated, her family's renunciation; and so gaily that it was justly suspected, with much oh-fieing and dear-meing, that she was going to keep secret tryst with her gallant. She rode her own little pad mare Astrology; Mistress Press, her maid, sat on a pillion

behind a hired man, and two stout pack-horses conveyed her trunks, her parrot and her pet spaniel Mischief. As little as her show of flight was her intention of hiding herself. She said to her maid at starting :

"I shall stop at the first house that will take us in."

Apparently she had either underestimated the pruderies, servilities and timidities of ordinary folk or had overestimated the largeness of their houses and hospitalities. Anyhow she was indebted for the first night to the mercenary accommodation of an inn, and had journeyed more than thirty devious miles from her native hills into the gentler sister county, before she found lodging in a purley-man's cottage on the borders of the royal demesne of Sherwood. This purley or purlieu-man was a mere squatter on the waste, and his cottage was but a four-roomed hut partly of mud and stud, partly of rough-hewn stone; but the man and his wife had no children, and though rough-mannered and of little scrupulosity were good-natured obliging thriftless likeable folk. Besides the situation and seclusion of their dwelling pleased Fortuna. She had the two best rooms hastily refurnished, and stayed on under the assumed name of Surety. She did not change her pleasure when she learnt, as she soon did through Press, that she lay within half a mile of the boundary of Annesley, whose late life-tenant, Mr. Chaworth, had married her mother's elder sister Elizabeth, of the Poles of Heage. But uncle and aunt were both dead, their son and successor and his lady were unknown to her, and if her knowledge of the connection tended to restrict her wanderings it was unwittingly, though certain it is that she eschewed the common road and never strolled in any direction more than a furlong or two from the house-door.

Now thirty miles in those days was a considerable separation; thirty miles of wild country thinly sprinkled with villages and enclosures, which were rather disconnected than united by a few vile roads. Within the space of a month it was variously rumoured of her that

she was dead, that she was being privately kept by her lover, that she was on the streets of London, that she had become an inmate of a French convent or of Bedlam, and that she had been married by the Rev. Mr. Sweetapple of Fledborough, the Greta Green of the Midlands, to a footman of the Duke of Devonshire's. Then the active interest of her acquaintance's calumny wearied; she was let go, was forgotten. Another belle led up the county ball at Derby, another lover sighed or was successful, another reputation suffered. Fortuna had no sisters; her only brother, the duellist, being legally debarred as a Roman Catholic from giving his own country the benefit of his courage and military abilities, took service in the army of the Emperor Charles VI and rose to high rank.

In the following spring Fortuna gave birth to a son. Her first whisper to her maid with her returning breath, "Now we shall always have a man in the house," was equally expressive of the woman's timidities and the mother's pride. Within twenty-four hours a priest knocked at the door in the disguise of a travelling pedlar. He sold Mistress Press a groat-halfpennyworth of needles, christened the babe in the name of Roland, confessed Fortuna, and we may hope, after enjoining a penance not too severe absolved her of the guilt of a Protestant alliance, certainly illicit however doubtfully legal. Then before the next hour had struck he departed with as little stir as he had come with. I do not know how his arrival befell so opportunely. I might guess at explanations, but it will save trouble both to writer and reader if we agree to call it a mystery without attempting to agree about the terms of our agreement.

A year or two later Fortuna's host found it advisable to make himself scarce. A purley-man was always looked on askance by the forest guardians as a certain intruder, probable poacher and trespasser. Of that particular purley-man we can only say that many a hind had been missing that winter from the Kirkby keeper's

walk, and that he went in a hurry. Fortuna gave him twenty pounds for his rights, such as they were, in the cottage; whose surroundings, as I have said, delighted her, perhaps because they offered such a likeness with such unlikeness to those of her moorland home.

The abbey of Newstead, situated at the head of the Leen valley and screened by thick woods, lies within the ancient limits of Sherwood; two miles off and just without those limits the rival house of Annesley stands conspicuous on its sylvan eminence. If we place ourselves in the valley between the two with Newstead on our right, Annesley on our left, the sun and the gently falling ground behind, the forward view is bounded by a somewhat singular escarpment, which springing from the heights above Annesley gradually sinks away and loses itself in the plantations of Newstead. Short as it is it goes under two names, the first and loftier portion being called the Robin Hood hills, the other the Mosley hills. It forms the southern edge of a plateau which is the most elevated as well as the most westerly part of old Sherwood, and which though long since brought under the plough still retains its old appellations of Kirkby Forest, Sutton Forest, Cock's Moor and the like. Its face is nicked at pretty regular intervals with gullies worn by rain-water dribbling down to feed the baby Leen at its base; and if it be allowed that the deeper and longer indentations of the Robin Hood hills divide them into something like the gouty misshapen fingers of a gigantic hand, those of their continuation, the Mosley hills, may be likened to the stumpy toes of an elephantine foot.

Fortuna's cottage was placed at a sort of corner formed by these Robin Hood hills and the southward-trending ridge from which they start, there narrowed to a mere neck; and thence it took its popular name of the Nook. It was by the side of the road to Mansfield, at the equal distance of about a mile and a half as the crow flies from Newstead, Annesley and Kirkby, a spectacular situation. To the south-east is the

ancestral domain of the Byrons and the green valley backed by the hills of Arnold and Mapperley; to the south the park of Annesley, a long incline open to the sun. North and north-east stretches the wind-swept plateau before spoken of; north-westward across the valley in which the Erewash takes its rise is the straight-backed hill whereon Kirkby-in-Ashfield is built, a long line of houses to which its steeped far-seen church stands fogleman. Beyond appear or disappear the dark ridges of the Derbyshire hills and moors, rank behind rank, dim and yet dimmer, until they mix with the clouds or are lost in the haze.

Now-a-days a couple of railway tunnels pierce the earth side by side just under the site of Fortuna's cottage, and many a smoke-spouting colliery is within view; but we must try to imagine a time when the soil was not troubled by these unresting ploughs, scored by these numerous roads and railways, bored by these mines, fenced off by these hedges, trodden by this busy multitude; a time when but for a few villages and the belt of cultivated land around each of them all that could be descried from that elevated spot was wood or waste, moor or marsh; when roads there were none save a few untended tracks ill-fitted for wheeled traffic; when Sherwood, though its trees were fast falling into decay, still stretched from Worksop to Nottingham, unenclosed except land under the plough and a few parks, and ranged by many a hundred head of deer both red and fallow.

Press fully expected that Fortuna who was physically timid would have shrunk from remaining with so slender a household in so solitary a situation; but her mistress was sustained by what might have been thought the chief drain upon her strength and courage. On the day when she took possession she said again to her maid, and she looked down at the child on her knee:

"We have still a man in the house."

The house was so near the edge of the forest that it was doubtfully within or without it, perhaps both

within and without. The encroachment, for such it was either on the roadside waste or the crown land, was regarded with much disfavour by the freeholders of Kirkby and the officers both of parish and forest. Fortuna received notices that her enjoyment of it would forthwith be disputed. She took no trouble to understand the drift of their phrasing, threats of presentment or indictment, but with the assurance of a perfect feminine ignorance tossed them aside and called in the joiner and bricklayer. She did far better than if she had called in the lawyer. For a party of impatient freeholders, accompanied by labourers armed with shovel, pickaxe and crowbar, set off that same day from Kirkby with the intention of settling the matter summarily by levelling the cottage with the ground. They had providently steeled their hearts beforehand against shrill female appeal and reproach, but they found the defence reinforced by a rough-tempered bricklayer and two stalwart assistants, a disconcerting contradiction of expectation. The bricklayer was cousin to one of them, more or less friendly with all, and they knew that he would fight more stubbornly to retain his job than they could on their consciences to deprive him of it. They returned to make the best of an abortive day at the "Blue Boy," and left him to finish digging out the foundations for an addition to the tenement. This was a parlour on the sunny side having a chamber over it for Fortuna, and divided from the older building by a passage, which had the staircase at one end and at the other a side door looking towards the road but opening into the garden. Fortuna's bold front and prescriptive right, the rivalry of claims and the uncertainty of the issue caused a lowering of both the royal and the parochial pretensions. Thenceforth she was suffered to enjoy her encroachment in peace.

Press remained with her, angular, capable, untirable; as to her person tall and of a dusky sallow complexion, with a considerable moustache on her upper lip, and on her chin in promise of a beard a thick pencil of bristles



stiffly upstanding from a large mole; which was the more noticeable that it was the almost universal fashion then for men to appear with their faces baby-smooth. In addition to her lady's-maidish accomplishments she could cook on occasion, could write legibly and keep accounts, so it may be wondered why she chose to administer the affairs of that lowly household, tend the child and oversee the rustic trollop who sluthered through the roughest of the work, rather than return to high life. It was not out of sentiment we may be sure; she was of that knotty hard-grained nature to which the weakness and the tenderness of such a feeling are alike alien. She herself put her decision and its motives barely and briefly before her mistress.

"I shall stop, ma'am, so long as you pay me my wages regular. My Lady Curzon has bespoke me if ever I want to better myself; but she's a tonguy woman, and there'd be so much ignorant cackle both up-stairs and down, and me with my mouth shut, locked up you might say, as you know why, that I couldn't abear it. I'd sooner suck-bottle babies and drive sluts for ever and ever, amen."

"Tut, tut, tut!" quoth the parrot. "Set thy cap straight, slut."

Press did not confine her attention to young Roland and the house; she took as particular care of her mistress's person and wardrobe as if that were her sole duty. She made it a point of honour to maintain the dressing of Fortuna's head and the decking of her robes at the very height of the mode. She was not a Catholic, but in an ordinary way was no church-goer. Before she took service with Fortuna she had been wont to say, "I can go to sleep at home without chilblaining my feet in winter or cricking my neck in summer; and I get my bellyful of the curate's snuffle when he dines in the servants' hall." But now when the chief neighbouring families were in residence she would trudge a couple of miles on pattens through snow or sludge, dust or mire, to the private chapel at Newstead or the parish church of Annesley in order to study fashion on the

persons of the ladies of the Byron and Chaworth families and their visitors. I fear there was a grain of truth in that well-circulated slander of the farmer's wife at Annesley Woodhouse, Mrs. Radage, who had eyes behind her head; namely that during the service she took patterns of toupee and mantua under cover of her prayer-book. "I must keep my hand in, ma'am," she would say, "or else when you've done with me or I've done with you, as the case may be, I shan't be worth my salt and pepper to Lady Curzon or anybody else above a 'pothecary's dame.'" But on such attendances at church she was always very careful to enter late, sit at the back and go away early, lest she should be recognized by any of the gentlemen's gentlemen or ladies' ladies in waiting.

Her temper kept its tart equilibrium amid the baby's stomach-aches and teething and the maid's everlasting spillage and breakage, but suffered a conspicuous tilt when Fortuna persisted in hardening and reddening her fair hands with garden work. In vain the lady protested that she wore gloves; the answer was bitter and prompt:

"Your hands, ma'am, which I've kep' white as milk and tender as satin, 'ud feel the insult through a myriam pairs of gloves. I'm mortal sorry as our roses and peaches, cauliflowers and sáary has to come out of the filthy dirty ground, though I'm not saying them as made us don't know better than me. Anyhow bumpkins' work is no sport for gentlefolk; that I will maintain if I'm drowned for't like a witch or frizzled for't like a husband-poisoner. Gloves indeed! Pugh!"

"Eve helped Adam in the garden of Eden, as we know on Mr. Milton's high authority."

"They wasn't gentlefolk."

"They came of the best of parentage."

"If they'd been anything out o' the common, ma'am, they wouldn't have been so long finding out their need of mantua-maker and tailor nor been so easy satisfied with such a paltry makeshift. Fig leaves indeed! Ugh!"

"Tut, tut, tut!" quoth the parrot. "Smoother thy hair, slut."

In the front of the cottage, between it and the wild moor and facing the sun, there was a small plot of ground some twelve yards by twenty, which when Fortuna arrived was but a grass-grown waste, only distinguishable from the surrounding wilderness by its broken fence of oak loppings, its two or three holly-bushes and a grim yew-tree that filled one corner. For fifteen months Fortuna had thought of it as nothing but a rude untidy way to a gate through which she seldom passed and an outside world which she never visited. But on the first sunshiny day in her second February there her careless eye caught a peeping of white through the mat of brown twitch and bent. She carelessly stepped towards it, and found to her delight that it was the first snowdrop of the year in its new-born purity, surrounded by a family cluster of budlets and blue-green leaves. She put the grass aside with her hand that the youngling might the better taste the sun, and she cooed over it in the same tongue as to her own babe. She visited it many times that day and the following days. After half a week there was another snowdrop out, next day two more, and so on until there were a dozen of them, a little group of white sisters, one as perfect as another.

Having become aware that there are treasures hidden under mean appearances, she kept her eyes open. The very day on which she was mourning the damage wrought to her little white firstlings by a boisterous south-wester she found under the fence a yellow primrose. Soon the ground was starred with primroses. They appeared in the most unlikely places; there was a rosette of yellow-green foliage and sulphur-coloured blooms in an old bottomless milk-pail; they peeped out of the stony ruins of a fallen wall which abutted on the house, lurked behind a rotting log, lined one side of the fence, lay at the foot of the stern old yew-tree as though it were their mother. She had not done wondering and searching and discovering these when

some daffodils—there were three clumps of them—showed the colour of their upright buds amid the delicate green. The buds swelled and drooped and swelled, slowly; so slowly that it seemed as though the heart of the parent plant were reluctant to give the world what hitherto it had hugged to itself. These flowers stood clear of the earth and added the third grace to the graces of form and hue—that of motion, as they swayed in the breeze.

One daffodil stood by itself, a single bud in the middle of the garden, and Fortuna looked with a tender eye upon its solitariness. It seemed to her that the coarse weeds and grasses threatened its prosperity with their encroaching rankness; she\* uprooted such as she could with her hands and cleared a space around it. In so doing she uncovered the just peeping shoots of she knew not what plant, feeble yellowish spikes, inch-high. She called her landlady, who said that if they weren't stars of Bethlehem she did not know what they were. Stars of Bethlehem! a fanciful name suggestive of marvels. She felt that she was on the brink of a world of discoveries. The purley-man's wife with whom she took counsel fetched her from the wood-shed a rusty old stable fork wanting one of its four tines. With that unwieldy tool in her unpractised hands she entered on a toilsome campaign against the weeds, and that was the beginning of her gardening; wherein she soon took so much delight, that when the weather was fit she gave it almost all the daytime which was not claimed by her infant. Indeed she commonly combined the two occupations and had little Roland, who very early found his feet, out with her in the garden; where while she smoothed and planted he plucked and trampled.

But as the boy's sturdy limbs grew apace he became dissatisfied with the amusement of such easy destruction and the range of so narrow a plot. That part of the garden which now most interested him was the gate; upon which it would appear that his thoughts were fixed even when his eyes were turned away. For no sooner did his mother relax her oversight than he

escaped into the adjacent wilderness; and if he had but half a minute's start there was much ado to find him among the heather, tall bracken and gorse. At last they took to securing the gate with a cord and blocking practicable gaps in the fence with old boxes; then for a while there was a sense of security within and without the cottage. The masterful child had perforce to be content with peeping through the bars of the gate at rabbits playing on the sward, at a goldfinch singing on a bush or a weasel passing on a stealthy errand of destruction. Often however his eyes would leave watching those near and little things to rest upon the sombre irregular line marked by the oaks of Newstead. What were his imaginings thereupon who shall say? Sometimes he would stand gazing mutely thus by half-hours at once; but if ever a herd of red deer came between he would turn his face for a moment towards the house and shout in much excitement, "Big yabbits, big yabbits!"

At length it occurred to him to climb the gate and fall down on the other side. To his surprise he did so quite easily. He at once made for the wood, and when after long search and much tearful anxiety on the women's part he was found there at fall of day by Jacob Caley, the Kirkby keeper, he was fraternizing with a party of charcoal-burners, whose sooty faces he contemplated with a horrified delight. After that nothing would have kept him at home but the rigour of shackles or locked doors. He almost lived in the forest, wandering there in all weathers, sometimes in the company of Jacob Caley, who took greatly to him and taught him woodcraft, but oftener alone and apparently unoccupied; though it may be surmised that all the while his brain was busily commenting on what his eyes saw and his ears heard. His mother had kept Astrology for him and he soon learnt to ride, but he early showed a preference for that form of progression which brought him nearest to the soil.

His book-learning meanwhile under his mother's direction made small progress, and indeed went little

further than a slovenly reading and a scrawl which might just pass for writing. His religious instruction hardly went so far. He was brought up in a decent observance so far as was possible of the forms of his religion. Both mother and maid agreed that he could say his paternoster and Ave Maria with a little prompting at least a month earlier than the most precocious of her cousin Stanford's ten. But Fortuna, ill instructed herself and without the help of any book but a breviary, was hardly competent for the simplest exposition of her faith's histories and mysteries, its awful inexplicabilities, saintly lives, heroic deaths, wonderful deliverances, terrible chastisements, glorious successes and failures. In merely attempting it she was probably as much a gainer as her child. Certainly she somewhat reformed the lax practice and speech, possibly the lax thinking, which she had learnt of a dissolute and irreligious society.

Of what she could thus teach her son she found him not altogether an indocile scholar, if only he was allowed sometimes to give his ear instead of his attention; but of outdoor things, wind and weather, tree and flower, the sentient occupants of earth, air and water, he acquired a mastery with such intuitive ease that he never knew when his ignorance passed into knowledge. The forest was an excellent book, a book in many volumes, offering much variety. By far the greater part of it was not woodland even then, perhaps never had been, and what timber there was was fast disappearing under the woodman's axe and the stealthier strokes of time; but there was still a middle strip pretty well wooded from Mansfield to within a few miles of Nottingham, comprising the great oak woods of Newstead and some smaller woods in the neighbourhood, Thieves' Wood and the adjacent Harlow Wood, Sansom Wood, Hayward Oaks and Bestwood; while easily within the range of such an athlete as could run by the hour were the glories of the Birklands and Bilhagh, of Thoresby, Rufford and Welbeck. Yet perhaps the distinctive feature of that region was those open undul-

ating breezy sandy tracts which surrounded and separated the woodlands, here yellow with gorse and broom, there purple with heather, yonder a rolling sea of bracken varying from a lusty green to a rich red-brown, or again an expanse of fine grass close-cropped by the deer, or all these in one. The underlying sand too would ever be peeping forth, not seldom became for a space greater or less its most prominent characteristic, whether naked or thinly interspersed with herbage; and here and there a gash in the surface laid bare the fundamental red rock. But whether sand or herbage, ling or wood, it was laced by many a green-margined clean-bottomed gently flowing brook, through whose clear waters trout and dace and gudgeon could be followed by the eye, whether they darted or were at rest; a pleasant country, though the farmers grumbled sorely at the havoc wrought on their crops by the king's uncontrollable deer, and moralists shook their heads over the temptation which those roving herds offered to the mean man, sportsman by nature but by fortune landless.

In the women's eyes the occasional rabbit or trout which Roland snared and brought to the pot was the only solid outcome of his rambles. But touching the vagabondage, the waste of time, the wetting, soiling or rending of clothes, Press had much more to say than his mother, whose bent was towards the gay and easily happy. In spite of her misfortune Fortuna showed an unclouded face to the daylight. As she had turned unruffled from a life of ease and honour to that discredited solitude, so she put by the book which Roland had thrown down, and after she had watched him out of sight went unconcernedly to her gardening, or the weather not permitting that sat at her harp, or took up the dropped thread of her knotting or of Mr. Pope's *Dunciad* or the *Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild*, or taught her parrot a new phrase.

## CHAPTER II

### MAINLY EDUCATIONAL

ON a Sunday morning of their third summer at the Nook Press came home from church with a manner of shutting the parlour door and ungloving herself, that showed something more than devotional excitement.

"I've been to Annesley church this morning, ma'am," she said.

"'Tis so fine a morning for a walk," answered Fortuna, "that any sort of sermon could hardly spoil it."

"I thought, ma'am, you'd be asking me who was there."

"I think, Press, you'll be telling me without so much trouble to my ma'amship. But sit down, for I perceive that yours is no standing tale."

"Besides the usuals, ma'am, there was Madam Alliott and Mistress Ann!"

"Does Aunt Alliott still wear her widow's weeds?"

"Yes, ma'am; and she don't look ill in 'em."

"And Aunt Nan is not married?"

"No, ma'am. I reckon she's sorry now she broke with the captain."

"You would have had her marry him that she might have broke with him the more completely? In truth 'tis a sad incomplete thing as it stands."

"I sat next Mistress Ann's new maid, as it happened; a green young thing that smelt violent strong of the dairy, and was glad of the chance to show off her ignorance. She told me behind her prayer-book as Mistress Ann is living with Madam Alliott at Netherton. She has the Daphne chamber that was Madam Alliott's.



The old cartoon hangings have been took down, and it has been new-hung very handsome with blue damask. They're only stopping a few days here, on their way south."

"Now tell me how Master Pat and particularly how little Master Billy were looking."

The latter, Mistress Chaworth's second and youngest child, was born the same year as Roland, and Fortuna had taken pleasure from the first in hearing, through Press of course, concerning the child's progress; how he took his teething, when he was breeched, with what diligence he advanced from pot-hooks to join-hand.

Fortuna's aunts never visited Annesley again. Next year the little boys lost their father, and that profuse hospitality which had encumbered his estates was exchanged for a severe economy. A few years later, when Roland was ten years old, the elder of the brothers also died. Fortuna sympathetically saw her kinswoman reduced to the sole care of a son of the same age as her own. Had opportunity offered she would have ventured to tender her condolence, but opportunity never offered. The bereaved mother shut herself up with her son and her sorrow, saw no company, not even her nearest relations, and never went beyond the limits of her park. Fortuna did however speak to the boy the next time that he rode by, black-suited, with his groom. She took the child's fancy with her smile and sweet voice and a little gift she made him. After that whenever during his boyhood he passed her way, he stopped for a few words over the fence, rarely entered the house to talk to the parrot or to eat a dish of baked pears or cranberries and clotted cream. He often talked to his mother of the beautiful lady who lived in the little house with a boy just as big as himself, and she did not seem unwilling to catch at second-hand a glimpse of pleasure and the world. He would have made friends too with Roland, who however held back from intimacy.

Another neighbour died about the same time as young

Patrick Chaworth, Lord Byron of Newstead, when we may be sure that Press enlarged to her mistress on the dismal funeral pomps, the lying in state of the corpse, the midnight burial and her ladyship's company-seeing in a room hung with black.

"'Tis something strange that we are all widows here," said Fortuna; "Widow Chaworth, Widow Byron and Widow Surety. But I have escaped the consolation of black bombazine. How should I look in't?"

"Don't talk on't, ma'am," said Press, "'tis vile unlucky."

"Fie! 'twould be a monstrous pity to spoil my luck, so for the future we'll talk no nearer to black than grey. That however is a dull neitherish thing which I don't much taste. After all we'll stick to the colours that go with my complexion whether they match my state or no."

As a residence Newstead Abbey was hardly livelier than Annesley Hall. Lady Byron, whose two sons were away serving in the navy, disliked it and after her husband's death seldom visited it.

"There's not one of us widows," said Fortuna, "who makes any sort of mark in the landscape."

Living in that rural seclusion she should have found the two hundred pounds a year left her by her mother sufficient for her needs, but she herself was careless in expenditure, and Press, though by no means lax, had high notions of the style in which her mistress and especially her mistress's maid ought to live. There were fortunately no means in such a place of getting largely into debt, but they had regularly a score of lenten days at the end of each quarter, during which their chief subsistence was from their stores of wheaten and barley meal, together with the fish which Roland caught in the Leen, Erewash and Maun, or the rabbits which he trapped on the hill-side. The latter form of sport at least was undoubtedly illicit, but Jacob Caley winked at it, and under his influence the deputy purlieu ranger did the same, only taking care to warn the boy

when any of the higher officers of the chase were likely to be in the neighbourhood.

Fortuna had given powers of attorney to Mr. Abel Smith the well-known Nottingham banker, who collected her income and regularly transmitted it to her on the first day of the month succeeding quarter-day, or if that happened to be a Sunday on the preceding day. The plain square-built person of the clerk who brought it, his pock-marked face, his jazey or woollen wig, his jack-boots, his snuff-coloured coat of drugget, his sturdy nag, his ostentatious horse-pistols were all objects of the greatest interest to Roland, who would not have missed the meeting for the certainty of seeing Jacob shoot down a hart of ten. Master Trivett's appearance, fortified by a one-eyed squint, was as unnecessarily ferocious as his conversation, which was mainly of highwaymen; but to Roland they were each as a glimpse through a practicable peephole into the great world, otherwise unknown to him.

Master Trivett not only brought; on his visit next after Lady-day he always carried back with him to bank seven out of Press's yearly wage of eight pounds. It gradually came to be understood that he was courting the waiting-woman or her banking account. He never spoke directly, but he kept his better eye in general attendance upon her, and he usually came bearing a gift which it was his first business to put into her hand; something indeed of little value, unless a large price were put upon the loving intention which went with it, an ounce of snuff, a paper of sugar-plums, a bundle of the latest issues of the *Nottingham Weekly Courant*, ribbon for her cap, lace for her stomacher or buckle for her shoe. She gave him no encouragement beyond that of ready acceptance and curt thanks, but she always spoke of his presents, his person and his talk with a contemptuous forbearance approaching the wife-like. It is noticeable moreover that she speedily got a habit of allowing or rather ordering him at each visit to smoke just one after-dinner pipe of tobacco in the

kitchen chimney; for which he was expected to find the tobacco, but she kept a long clay pipe for his use from quarter-day to quarter-day.

Through him alone did Roland come into actual touch with the great outside world, though on a rare sometimes he met an adventurous traveller on the Nottingham and Mansfield road, or threading the intricacies of the forest with an armed escort and a guide from the guide-house by Red Hill; but them he rather avoided. Neither was the pageantry of the chase more for him than a distant spectacle. He stood aside and looked on. He got excited over the vicissitudes of the hunt, but at bottom he liked the forest better when that brilliant mob of dukes, lords and gentlemen, belaced and bewigged, had parted and ridden their several ways. He made no friends and few acquaintances in the neighbouring villages; save that through Jacob he became familiar with the deputy purlieu ranger, the Newstead, Blidworth and Mansfield keepers, and with Weems, the woodward of Sutton, a famous boxer and toper. He also kept up a dry sort of fellowship with the forementioned charcoal-burners, father and two sons, who generally plied their craft in the neighbourhood of Newstead. His real intimacy was with wood and waste and their numerous population of both winged and groundling, with tree and herb, with the changes in the sky and the waft of the wind; and his boyish ambition was to be a forest keeper.

His day intimacy I should have said. Naturally enough when he was with his outdoor companions his speech and manners partook of their rusticity, though he could on occasion behave with a quite gentlemanly arrogance; but when he passed from moor and forest through his garden gate he was in another country, spoke another language, was subject to other laws and restraints. His evenings he always spent with his mother. She had never mentioned her fear of being alone in the dark of the night, but he would seem to have known it without telling or to have acted on it

without knowing. There was in truth a rare affection, and rarer than that a real sympathy between the two, though after the kissing-time of his childhood was passed they made little wordy expression of their feelings; he out of a natural reserve, she perhaps less naturally and through a complicity of causes, whose only outward show was in a peculiar gay elusiveness of speech.

They played cribbage together and backgammon, or making the unwilling Press drop her needlework and bringing her in they played at ombre. Then he sang to his mother's harp in a rough manly baritone the "Leather Bottel," the "Hunt is up," "Down among the Dead Men" and "Vernon's Fox-chase"; or oftener and more to his liking merely listened while she sang "Barbara Allen," "Phillida flouts me," "Come, Lasses and Lads," or that old ballad of "the Derby hills that are so free," in a light airy style which seemed to buzz away from any expression of deep feeling. Much of the evening was passed in conversation, to which Fortuna was by far the larger contributor, and to which as her son grew older she gave a larger scope. While avoiding anything that would fix her identity or reveal her history she freely and graphically described persons and places which she had seen, events of which she had been spectator at first or a near second-hand.

Thus Roland learned something, not altogether to his admiration, of the appearance, manners and morals of the regnant and the late kings and queens; knew more than the names of the rulers of fashion, literature and politics; had in imagination frequented ball, crowded assembly and masquerade in the dissipated capital, had gone to the play and then up-river to Vauxhall; had by the same easy conveyance visited Tunbridge Wells, Bath and Buxton; had seen men play high, drink deep, love laxly and selfishly, quarrel suddenly and bloodily. He could fancy he had heard Mr. Pope exchange fulsome compliment for covered sarcasm with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, had stood by and let

Captain Nicholls do fashionable murder upon Mr. Hancock, had seen Booth as Cato and Mrs. Oldfield as Lady Betty Modish, had heard Cuzzoni sing, had taken part in a street-row between Jacks and Mugs and sat a pale spectator at Christopher Laver's trial.

Such partial information would be likely to exaggerate to him the differences between the fashionable world and that of which he had experience. An equal acquaintance with both would have taught him that such differences did not go so far as skin-deep, being a mere diversity in colouring, as for instance between a martial red and a clerical black and white.

Large doubtless was the influence of the familiar society and everyday conversation of a woman like Fortuna, easy-tempered, sprightly, acute, and who though tied at birth to narrow dogmas and formulas and by no means learned might yet claim to be one of the first of that new thing in the modern world, an emancipated woman. But after all the concentrated affection between mother and son was the chief civilizer of that ranger of the fields. It was as though they had each of them bestowed on the other their whole sum of love. They delighted in each other's company, he so serious and sparing of speech, she so gaily frivolous, that Press declared they looked when together more like brother and sister than child and parent.

His schooling, as we have said, had gone no further than elementary reading, writing and ciphering acquired at his mother's side; but even therein he had the advantage over many an opulent young squire of his day, and indeed over many a beau and wit who made a considerable figure in high life. Fortuna's chief discontent was that she found no means to procure him lessons in fencing. That he could shoot well enough with Caleb's fowling-piece did not in her eyes make up for it.

Thus he lived a sort of double life or at least looked on at the pageant of two lives, the one natural, serious, and viewed by day with his own unsophisticated eyes;

the other the gay world of perverted fashions seen in an artificial light through the medium of a dainty worldling. Such a rearing necessarily resulted in a certain confusion not merely of language, dress and manners, but also of opinions, pretensions, aspirations. Moreover he could not but grow up to perceive the ambiguity of his mother's position, which she was too negligent to conceal and perhaps too proud to explain. She claimed to be a wife and did not produce her husband, to be a high-born lady and lived in a rude solitude, unvisited and unfriended; claims not made in so many words but in unstudied pretensions so much stronger than words. It was the talk of the place that she dined an hour later than my Lady Byron, that in the fashion of her head-gear she was three years ahead of ambitious Miss Biddy Eustick the rector's daughter, that she drank her Pekoe out of china, used a silver fork, had a clean napkin to every meal, and walked on carpets when many a squireling of the neighbourhood had no better than rushes or bare boards, with many a similar piddling detail. In short she was a puzzle to that rustic neighbourhood, and the duller, the more ignorant a person is the more he resents being puzzled. It was however certainly known that she was a Papist, and therefore an enemy of the church as by law established and of the Hanoverian succession.

There was of course much talk about her, seldom kindly, and out of so many words some could not but drop in her son's hearing, words which obscurely disquieted or offended him. Yet it says something for those common folk's self-restraint and natural courtesy, that Roland had turned seventeen before anything was said in his presence so openly disparaging his mother as to call for answer or action on his part; and when it did happen his own rashness was partly to blame. It was the tenth of June, and he ventured to appear in Kirkby village wearing a white rose in honour of the Pretender's birthday. Abel Marrot, a broad-shouldered labourer and reputedly a deer-stealer and poacher, two

years his senior, snatched the factious decoration from his hat, put it in his capacious mouth, chewed it quickly to a pulp with his great teeth, then spat it forth in the dust at Roland's feet, bidding him pick it up and wear it again if he would. He added thereto speech as to the boy's parentage in the highest degree offensive. There was a blow and the return of a blow, followed by a set fight with no more delay than in stepping off the road and round to the back of the church. There on that conspicuous hill Roland fought as long as he could stand by himself, then had to be helped home by two of the bystanders, good-natured positive Philip Hardy and Timothy Pye, who always said yes to Philip's yea. By the way these two condoled with him.

Said Phil, "Yo've blackened his two brazen black-guard eyes a proper black."

"And two's all 'e hes," said Tim.

"But black eyes 'ud be noat to a lad wi' his shou'ders, not if they was twenty-two."

"Not hafe a flea-bite," said Tim.

"Lesser uns moot 'umble theirsens to swaller a bit o' sauce from big uns wi'out pullin' faces."

"It's noat if yer bolt it down straight off," said Tim.

"Larn what yer faightin' weight is, then yer know welly nigh all a man needs to know."

"Mine," said Tim, "is twenty stun afore dinner an' a few hodd pounds more after."

"If yer strength is small, pray God send yer a good pennorth o' cowardice."

"A good Christian prayer," said Tim; "a man needn't want no better."

And so forth; but this shuttlecock sort of colloquy—one shuttlecock to two battledores—did not salve the least of Roland's smarts, and as I have no proof either that he was any the wiser for it in his future conduct I beg to excuse myself from recording more of it.

Fortuna questioned him about his injuries to eye, nose and mouth, but he put her off with a half-explana-



tion. Press, not satisfied, got the truth of it out of the butcher and was fiercely indignant.

"I wish I'd been there," she exclaimed. "I'd have wrote with my ten finger-nails on that great big foul-mouthed rascal's chaps."

She took a fierce pinch from her iron snuff-box and snapped the lid to again. The butcher looked on her with undisguised admiration.

"By George, mistress," said he, "but yo've a man and a hafe's spunk unner your ribs."

"I should be lacking," answered she disdainfully, "if I hadn't room there for a sight more than that."

She had to bottle it up for two days however before she found opportunity to speak to Roland alone, after Fortuna had retired for the night. She shut the door but stood thereby.

"You've fought in a righteous cause, Master Roland," she said, "and heaven above will see as you don't lose by't."

"I shan't," said he; "I've gotten a sprained thumb by't."

He rose from his chair; he evidently disliked her broaching the subject. He went towards the door but Press did not give him way.

"For that, Master Roland, you'll be given forty fold."

"Forty sprained thumbs? Where should I bestow 'em?"

His sorry jesting betokened his uneasiness; yet Press not giving way he would not ask for it, but retired to the other side of the room and peeped between curtain and window jamb at the night without, a blank black prospect.

"It can't be gainsaid he was a mighty killing young spark," said she.

"Who?" said Roland quickly, while yet her speech was a mere sound in his ears.

The words had flown forth, and regret it as he might he could not recall them. He could only come away

from the window, take up Fortuna's still open book and affect to be suddenly interested, standing, in the midst of Mr. Shenstone's *Pastoral Ballad*. Press had of course immediately answered, "Your father"; but though he could not make his ears deaf he could put on a deaf look.

"You're wonderful like him, Master Roland."

Roland frowned upon that.

"Espeshly when you're put out, like as now."

He tried to clear his frown that he might look less like his father; but only frowned the more and was the more like. Seeming to guess as much he turned over a dozen leaves at once, and hid his father-resembling face as well as he could behind the insufficient duodecimo.

"Though he didn't belong a first-quality family he was hisself one of the smartest of the smarts."

"Like me again, I suppose?" said Roland with a sudden new bitterness, and flung the vain book down on the table.

"Ay, i' faith, if all had their rights."

Roland thought he heard Fortuna's footstep on the floor above.

"Hush!" said he. "My mother will hear."

Press at once took that as establishing an understanding between them. She came so far forward that she could rest her hands upon the table. But what took weight from her feet seemed to add it to her utterance.

"It's no use trying to deceive you, Master Roland; he's a lawyer. But at any rate he's one of them tip-top sort called bannisters. It's not like Miss Jekyl who disposed of herself to a paltry pettifogging attorney, to say nothing of Miss Lacy marrying that scrub of a curate; which everybody did say was an extreme dirty way of doing the business."

He would have repressed the next question if he had not been sure of the answer.

"He's not dead then?"

Mistress Press held up her hands from the table and exclaimed :

"Marry come up, Master Roland ! Dead ? Not likely. He is but forty-four." And Mistress Press was fully conscious of her own forty-five. "Seeing as Mr. George's sword missed a little of doing it for him."

"What are you talking about ?" he said, in the tone rather of a check than an inquiry.

"Madam's family, d'ye see, being Catholics and Tories and topping people, him being a Protestant and a Whig and a nobody wasn't big enough for her ; for with all his good looks and fine manners he hadn't hardly a scrap of fortune in this world but his law books. So there was a pretty breeze between him and Mr. George, madam's brother, and a duel in which both of 'em got the worst on't. Whether 'twas the blood-letting chilled his liver or the to-do frightened his lawyer-ship I don't know, but we've never seen nor heard from him from that day to this."

That was the sum of what she told him, and was perhaps well-nigh all she had to tell. She had not spoken of the marriage and he had not asked about it. He never of course mentioned the matter to his mother, and he was fully conscious thenceforth, as she had ever been, of something between them which had to be ignored. It was a mere film of concealment, no thick opaque skin to sever or dull their sympathy ; which indeed on his side was rather quickened by the new sentiment of pity. Yet it could not but to some extent mar the natural joyousness of their intercourse ; he felt the irksomeness of it, the wrongness of it, and it contributed to a growing resentment against his father. He thought of all the years during which he had been but a clinging baby-weight to her unassisted strength ; and now that he had almost reached the stature of a man he put, it was much to be feared, only the heavier burden upon her ; even if the rabbit or two a week were counted as a set-off. That is to say, now and again he thought, felt, resented ; in general he was as well con-

tent, or almost, as before with the open fields, the woods and the weather, with the evenings by the fireside, the game of cribbage, his mother's lively talk; and he took a daily pride in his increasing bulk and strength, looking forward to the time when he could encounter Abel Marrott upon even terms. Thus his dissatisfaction was but an obscure unfashioned thing, yet ready to come into shape should his fortunes ever become seriously involved or the object of his resentment be brought nearer to him. Nevertheless one thing was constant amid those indistinct fluctuations; he remained more keenly aware of the anomaly of his position; he felt separated as much from the yokels about him as from the gentlefolk whom he only saw from a distance.

The young squire of Annesley was no exception. The two young men now only met when they chanced to pass one another on the road, and that with the slightest of acknowledgments. For as William Chaworth grew up his visits to Fortuna had gradually become less frequent. The change may have begun with the adolescent shyness or Roland's persistent coldness, and was perhaps helped by a moral cowardice which shrank from an unpopular acquaintance. It is only fair to say that he never gave his tongue, though he may sometimes have seemed to lend his ears, to calumny against Fortuna. The estrangement was certainly complete soon after Lord Byron came of age, left the navy and went to reside permanently at Newstead. Chaworth was then only seventeen years old, and in spite of the arrogant ungenial disposition already developed in the peer was attracted to him by his title, his kinship, greater age and vastly greater experience. His lordship, accepting his familiarity with a good deal of cousinly condescension, allowed him for a time as much of his intimacy as he gave to anybody.

## CHAPTER III

### HOLLIN WELL

THE little river Leen has its source at the foot of the Robin Hood hills just outside the woods of Newstead and about a mile from its abbey. Within a quarter of that distance from its origin the streamlet receives the tribute of the Hollin Well, a little gush of clear water from under the left-hand bank bounding the shallow dingle through which it runs. On their union the joint waters are dammed up into a small fish-pond, one of many in the Newstead demesne, but escaping thence flow as before with many a tiny twist over clear red sand or smooth pebble under the shade of birch, thorn or alder, until soon they are again banked up and enforced into some depth and short quietude, and so pass on to the artificial lakelet beside which the abbey stands. Thither on a sultry day in the summer came Roland on his way home after a long morning's ramble in Thorneywood Chase, that smaller portion of the forest district which lay about Nottingham, the haunt of many a fallow deer as the high forest was of red. He stopped by Hollin Well and making a cup of his hand drank freely again and again. He was hungry as well as thirsty and his home was only a mile away, almost within sight, but he was pleased to be deaf to its call and the claims of nature; or only so far indulged these as to gather and eat a few of the bilberries which grew plentifully thereabouts. Then he sat down on the grass under the shade of an old thorn-tree.

The ground behind him gently rising towards the hills was yellow with gorse bloom, which seemed to give back with a milder glow some of the burning sun's

blaze and heat. Below flowed the brook, now in the sun, now in a shade that was never dense. Before him was the forest of mighty oaks behind which Newstead Abbey was hidden away. There was nothing to remind him of man; not even a waft of blue smoke curling up through the dark trees. When he lay back his full length he saw less of the woods but more of the sky, just where it was least robbed of its blue by haze or sun. His bed was strewn with odorous bracken; a grasshopper chirped at his feet, tunable wherewith a bunting reiterated its squeaky song; a rook drawled a slow caw, once, twice, from overhead; the spring under the bank gushed and prattled. A hart was somewhere in harbour among the trees; he could hear it pant with the heat. He lay awake long enough to feel the comfort of lying, then fell fast asleep.

When he awoke his brain was full of strange wild unseizable strains, and the after-consciousness came to him that his slumbers had been drenched in music. But while he expected a waking continuance of it it had ceased, though he could not say when it had ceased. Nevertheless he felt no break; the sounds, if they were real sounds, were perfectly at one with the silence that ensued, a pure white silence, even the grasshoppers were at rest.

The shade had left him and he lay in the sunshine, but the serener shine of evening; the sky above was bluer still. He lay and breathed the fragrance of his couch, and listened to that strange duet between the universal silence and the rhythmic reverberations of his dream-soaked brain. Presently he heard consciously but only by degrees a material sound, that of human voices close by, two of them, a man's and a woman's; the man's gravely musical, the woman's peevishly shrill. When he tried indolently to divide the sounds into meanings he found that he was listening to an unknown tongue. The surprise thoroughly roused him; he sat up. On the bank a little way down-stream two rude tents were pitched which were not there when he

went to sleep, and near them some half-dozen<sup>h</sup> beasts of burden, horses, ponies and asses, were tethered and grazed the herbage. He stood up and saw beneath him in the dell by the brook's side a man and a woman seated under a birch-tree, talking vehemently. Immediately they ceased talking and turned their heads his way. He walked down to them and bade them good-day, which they civilly returned.

The passage of all kinds of wanderers through the forest was frequent, and Roland at once knew these by their dark eyes, black hair and tawny skin to be Gipsies, a folk whose presence was tolerated rather than liked both by the forest officers and the general inhabitants. The woman rose, and that and the quick glance of her eyes drew Roland's attention first to her. She was of a buxom middle-age, but with a shrewish and dangerous cast of countenance only half covered up with a trade smile. She wore a bright yellow handkerchief on her head, thick shoes and a short scarlet gown. The ornaments in her ears and the rings on her hands were of gold. The man was of like age, but his handsome features were not marred by anything ill-natured or evil in their expression. He wore a broad-brimmed hat, dark green coat, scarlet waistcoat, leathern breeches and top-boots; and though the whole of his dress was much damaged by wear and weather it sat upon him with the grace of suitability.

"Why does the pretty gentleman look at us so," said the woman in a sort of whine; "as if he'd never seed poor wandering folk afore?"

"It's only," answered Roland, "because I'm surprised to see you here; for you're not allowed to camp i' this part o' the forest."

"Why?" said the woman, and her nasal whine became a guttural snarl. "Are they so nice here as they counts every blade o' grass the hosses eats? They shut off the earth from us, why don't they shut the sky off too?"

"Nay, nay," said the man, "the youth has warned

us fairly. We thank him, and we've no quarrel with nobody. If we speak civil to him, maybe he'll tell us where we can pitch our tents without giving offence ayther to keeper or constable. We've never been i' these parts afore."

Roland was going off, but stopped, and without turning round said over his shoulder, while pointing with his left hand to the right:

"You might try Thieves' Wood; yon patch o' measly oak. Mappen Jacob wouldn't interfere with you there."

"Is that where us travellers generally lies?"

"When there's only two or three of you you must go where you may; when there's a many you can sometimes pick and take."

"We've travelled in our twenties and thirties," snarled the woman; "ay, and our forties and fifties too. Whose fault is't that we go about now like mumping tinkers?"

"Peace, Zuba," said the man; "it's nobody's fault. For the fault o' fortune is nobody's fault. Would there be a deal o' harm, think yè—we're peaceful honest folk—if we just stopped where we was for one night?"

Roland found himself turning and facing the strangers after all. He had a keeper-like aversion to such intruders, but the man at least was good-looking and well spoken.

"Our keeper's a good-natured man, but he has no great fancy for you Gipsies."

"Gipsies?" said the woman. "Who calls us Gipsies says more nor he can stand by."

"It's true," said the man; "we've no right to the name."

"I reckon Jacob won't ax; he'll go by your colour."

"That's how 'tis you are so aisily desaiued." The man's eyes had hitherto seemed hardly to take Roland in, but suddenly they lost a curious mistiness which had filmed them over and looked on him with a singularly searching gaze. "For instance, young man, judging of you by your colour, who could tell whether you was



clodhopper or gentleman? Judging by the colour, who could tell whether yond flea-bitten hoss o' mine was worthy twenty pound or twenty shillings? Or them two tents, reckoning 'em by the colour, which on 'em should you take to hold the thing o' the greatest vally?"

The Gipsy woman, who had been looking down, looked up with a keen quick flash of the eye, divided between speaker and spoken-to. Roland's indifferent glance hardly went so far as the tents and immediately returned, not to the speaker, whom he did not answer, but to pick his way among the rank bracken that encumbered his feet, for he began again to move off.

"Stop!" said the man; and Roland looked back, though he did not altogether stay the action of his feet. "If I was to say to ye, 'Take one o' them two tents and all that's in't,' which on 'em would you choose?"

Said the woman with a strange oath, "What are you a-driving at?"

The man had spoken so earnestly that Roland stopped and answered, though he thought the question idle:

"How could I say unless I looked nigher?"

"Look."

"It's hardly worth my while."

"Again you're a-judging by the colour."

Roland's careless glance went to the tents, just to and fro.

"I don't see much difference, even in colour."

"Look nigher."

"I think I'll be saying good-day."

Roland moved away as if for the Mosley hills and home, but his steps, perhaps unwittingly, took more and more an eastward bent; so that presently he was making straight for the tents. Then the two Gipsies began to walk in the same direction, but in the hollow below beside the stream. As they went words passed between them in their own tongue; the woman's many and vehement and evidently expostulatory; the man's few and in tone rather apologetic than explanatory. Mean-

while Roland had reached the tents, and looking at them with an afternoon curiosity saw that the nearer was much the larger and better, the brown blankets which composed its outer covering being new and weather-proof in every part. He saw so much and barely more, the gaping door not tempting him to peep in, as he kicked away a snarling dog and passed carelessly on to the farther tent, the smaller and worse. Its threadbare blankets had many a train, many a patch and here and there a rent; the curtain was dropped over its entrance; it seemed to have even less than the other to attract his attention. He thought that he was passing on as carelessly as ever, until he found that he had stopped by the door. With hardly any hesitation he drew the blanket aside and peeped in. Such was the difference between the outer sunshine and the dusky interior, that he saw nothing beyond the trodden turf about the entrance, save where a shaft of sunlight flashed through a rent in the wall and alighted on a hand small and adorned with a glittering gold ring, and on the surrounding portion of a blue cloth garment; both evidently belonging to a human being, presumably female and recumbent. He knew he was being watched from behind; he felt a shyness of going further and at the same time a great curiosity. After the gift to the former feeling of a few seconds of delay he said:

"Is anybody in?"

The hand was withdrawn, there was a stirring of the blue garment. What was recumbent apparently sat up, so that the shaft of light fell upon a head instead of a hand, a quite girlish head of a singular dusky beauty and set about with an abundance of glossy black hair in long plaits. There were small ear-rings in her just peeping ears and a triple necklet of gold coins about her neck. That was all he could see, the head and the neck. Her dark eyes were fixed on him; the sleep had not quite left them and their gleaming humidity was troubled by a certain wonderment. The man and woman stood a little way off and watched him with a

dissembled eagerness. To the door of the 'other tent had come a young man of a somewhat paler complexion than true-bred Gipsies usually have, and he too was following Roland's movements, with an evil eye in which the curiosity was less than the malignancy.

"Why do you come here to me, pretty gentleman?" said the girl in the sing-song of a musical surprise.

"The Gipsy man invited me to come."

"My father, Basil Lee?"

"May be."

"Why did he send you?"

"'Twas a fancy of his to try me, how I should choose."

He stood in the sunshine. The occupant of the gloomy interior could see, framed by the narrow doorway, a tall strong comely youth, fair and blue-eyed, in a plain fustian suit. His long yellow hair was tied with a black ribbon. She rose and came into the half-light about the tent mouth. It could then be seen how gracefully slim and supple she was; and tall too though evidently not far advanced in her teens. Her blue skirt of a fine camlet cloth fell but little below her knees; there was no concealment of her dark blue silk stockings flowered with a scarlet thread nor of the large silver buckles to her small shoes. The young man came forward from the other tent. His dress was similar to the older Gipsy's, but if not of better materials was much newer or better kept. His brown coat with large silver buttons, his red waistcoat, yellow breeches and high-crowned hat with a crimson ribbon offered a wider mixture of colours. He had lace ruffles to his shirt at the breast and wrists, wore silver spurs, carried a heavy silver-mounted riding-whip, and altogether had an air of greater prosperity than his fellow. But his gloomy sallow visage had somehow an unhealthy as well as an evil look, though he was strongly built and not unshapely. Between each ear and glittering eye a long black lock of hair hung down to his shoulder. The girl stood but a moment, then came out to Roland, put forth her hand and said:

"I'm willing. If you'll be my rom I'll be your romi, true and faithful, to foller you all the world over."

The younger Gipsy man uplifted his hands and shrieked something in his own tongue; the woman Zuba too cried out.

"She has spoke," said the father in English; "the word must bide; I can't do noat. It lays now with the young ria."

The younger man burst in upon the girl with words apparently of expostulation, entreaty, even threat, in the same dark language, but receiving no answer, no sign even that he was heard, suddenly broke off and turned upon Roland a look of such malignity as no words could have made better or worse.

"Cease, Ethan," said the older man, still in English. "What's offered can't be withdrawn. It's for him ayther to take or to leave."

Roland understood by their eager looks rather than their words that he was expected to speak.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"It's thus," said the father; "this maid o' mine, Alfa Lee by name, being of the age to choose, offers hersen to you for to be your wife."

In his surprise Roland took a step or two backwards, would indeed have been glad to get away without a word; but four pairs of glittering eyes were fastened on him and held him from the disgrace of flight. He said shamefacedly:

"We are neither of us old enough to think of marriage."

The woman laughed, a laugh of evil sound; the young man's scowl of pure malignity changed to one mixed with contempt.

"You're mista'en," said the father; "my daughter is turned fourteen, and you as I take it are three years older; old enough and to spare."

"Besides"—the youth blurted it, addressing the man rather than the girl—"besides I'm an English gentleman, and she's—"

"What, English gentleman?"

"A Gipsy girl."

From one of the three adults behind Roland came a peculiar low gurgling laugh apparently hysterical but quickly suppressed, which he hardly heard and marked not at all; for his eyes were following the girl. She had darted but one angry glance at him—and it was wonderful how her wrath enhanced her beauty, even as the sunset owes its pride of colouring to the storm—then turning abruptly went back into her tent and dropped the blanket that covered its mouth.

"What have ye to say again Gipsies, if Gipsies we be, English gentleman?" said her father.

"You steal and lie."

"Only by way o' business. If you'd joined us you'd have found us to be the truest and staunchest o' pals. But you're one o' the Gaujos, men who prides theirsens on being true nayther to friend nor enemy."

"And mark my words, my pretty fellow," said Zuba in a furious scream, "the time'll come when you'd be thankful of a Romany chal to stand arween you and the gallows. You've lost that, throwed it clean away, as if it was dirt; and I for one am glad on't, for I don't like ayther the cut of your face or your manners or your Gaujo speech. But when you want help most I'll be there, don't fear, to dance a merry jig and shake my tomtom to the time of your gallow-tree's dance. And my lad Ethan will be there too without fail to fiddle to it; there'll be that much tendance on ye besides the sheriff and the pretty hangman. Your future shall be as black as the looks you gives the Romany is black; your course shall be as cross as the words you says to them is cross, and the Romany chals and chies shall have laughing enough if they only laughs once every time you cries."

Having ranted this forth with a wild overstrained passion, she suddenly fell silent for mere want of breath. Then Basil turned to Roland and said sternly:

"What more d'ye wait for? She has telled you your fortuné, and without charging for it."

"I'll not be beholden to her," said the boy with a hot disdain; "there's a shilling more than it's worth."

Down on the green at her feet he threw a shilling, which Ethan straightway pounced upon and pocketed.

"It's well," said Basil; "dukker that's bought is nought. I wish ye no such black ending as that, though like all the Gaujo rias you're proud-snouted and mighty self-consated."

Of which Roland heard little or nothing, for he had at once turned his back and stridden rapidly away. He had not however gone many yards, before he was stopped by a young man who crossed his path and said roughly:

"What are you doing here, boy?"

"I am walking here, my lord," answered Roland.

For he knew that moody-eyed dark-complexioned imperious young man to be Lord Byron.

"Are you one of my servants or the Lord Warden's?"

"No, my lord, I am no man's servant."

"Then who are you?"

The Gipsies were all intent, both eye and ear; the girl had come again to her tent door; and Roland felt though he had his back to them, that they were mightily enjoying that sudden blow to his pride.

"I am Roland Surety," he answered, "Mistress Surety's son."

"Hoho! Dame Surety, yonder purleywoman's cub? And what's your business here?"

Roland might have answered that it was no concern of his lordship's, seeing that he was then twenty yards on the right side of the Newstead boundary. But in those days a peer was privileged not only at Westminster but on common English ground; therefore he did well to restrain himself somewhat and say:

"None, my lord; I am taking my pleasure."

"Then I'll lessen it if you come trespassing here again."

With that his lordship walked on past the Gipsies, of

whom he took no notice whatever, to the sensible increase of Roland's mortification.

To his mother Roland never said anything about that encounter, but thenceforward, out of pride rather than fear, he took care never to stray on the Newstead estates and the Newstead walk of the forest beyond the undoubted rights of way. Lord Byron met him but seldom, and then went by him down-looking without a word, apparently without recognition.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MINUET

ROLAND continued to develop during that and the following year, but never went further from home than once to the annual wrestling for Sir Thomas Parkyns's laced hat at Bunny, seven miles beyond Nottingham. This by the by was his last ride upon poor old Astrology, who took a chill in the inn stable at Bunny and died in two days of inflammation of the lungs. His boyish anticipation of the life of a gamekeeper and the reversion of Jacob's office had latterly dwindled to the thinness of a habit, and had been altogether relinquished after that encounter with Lord Byron which had so restricted his liberty in the forest. Moreover the satisfaction that he had felt in his secluded rusticity began to be troubled not only by that certain distaste but also with a vague unrest. He was visited by dreams of a more brilliant and eventful future; mere dreams it is true, sojourners at the inn of his thoughts, but which tended to recur more and more frequently. His knowledge of the outer world was mainly derived from his mother's conversation and was therefore by no means up to date, though Master Trivett would sometimes bring with him besides his gossip of passing events a few numbers of the *Nottingham Weekly Courant*, a meagre twopence-half-pennyworth. He missed of course the political sermons by the parson of Kirkby on the first of August, the fifth of November and the King's birthday, as well as the more or less covert counterblasts of the parson of Annesley; and there was no other vehicle of news but the belated and incorrect hearsay of the illiterate farmers and peasantry, and the slow percolation through the



country at intervals of several years of a new political song, or a song which might be twisted into political allusions. Yet during the supremacy of the Pelhams the forest folk took more interest than usual in affairs of state. They would never believe that his honour Mr. Pelham was higher in office than his grace the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Steward, Warden and Keeper of the Forest of Sherwood; but their conclusions as to the general trend of events were not so far out as might be inferred from their grossly inaccurate and incomplete information. It was universally accepted save by a few cranks who affected singularity, that before long with the help of the French, who instead of our waiting were again our active enemies, James the Second's grandson would make another attempt on the crown. A storm and a fleet scattered did but delay it. In the towns there were furious politicians ready to argue and cudgel one another to the death, but the mass of the people, though hating popery and disliking change, anticipated the coming struggle with a stolid curiosity rather than fear. It needed indeed very long sight to see what they stood to lose by any political change whatsoever.

In the fall of the year 1744, when Roland was midway between his eighteenth and nineteenth birthdays, Jacob Caley the keeper died, and the appointment was given to Abel Marrott of Kirkby, the young man with whom he had fought in vindication of his mother's reputation, and for whom he had kept up an unreconciled enmity. But for every stone he put on Marrott put on two, and it was a grievous disappointment to him when at length he found himself compelled to drop all hope of ever overtaking his antagonist's fighting weight. Abel was then, a rough-made big-boned six-foot fellow, with a head of bristly black hair and a stubby beard to match. On the first day of his keepership he met Roland on Cock's Moor and warned him off his walk of the forest. A week later Fortuna's King Charles spaniel was found shot dead ten yards from the gate, and Roland reasonably suspected that it was Abel's doing. He lighted on

him at the next bull-baiting at Sutton and taxed him with it.

"Yo're a liar," said the fellow, "and a papish hound. But I like yer so much I'll gie yer this promise for yersen; if ever I cop a dog o' yourn with one o' his fore-feet ower the forest bounds I'll nubbut shoot him once."

"If ever you do," said Roland, "you shall pay for't."

"Ay? Yo talk large! And who'll mek me pay for't?"

"I shall."

"Yo? Much yo! Yo're nubbut purley. Yo'll want more i' your guts, surry, nor a bit o' fish o' Fridays to swell yer out to that."

But Roland, ashamed of being drawn into a wrangle before so many bystanders, turned away and said no more. Thenceforth so far as might be without loss of self-respect he kept out of Marrott's way. When they did meet the new keeper was always insolent and he himself disdainfully self-restrained, cool without, hot within, expecting when time should bring their quarrel to a head. He felt the discourtesy even more than the irksomeness of this and the former curtailment of his free range in moor and woodland. Both together they helped largely to detach his inclinations from home.

The papistry of the Chances was a point of honour rather than a religion, just as their Jacobitism was a tradition rather than an enthusiasm. Both perhaps were only kept alight, not to say aglow, by the bellows of a persecution all the more inflammatory for being so pettily spiteful. Every now and then the Catholic gentleman was being hit in the back with a pebble flung from a safe corner by an urchin or by Parliament up in London. How slightly political and religious sentiments had influenced Fortuna is shown by her union more or less legitimate with a Protestant Whig, though no doubt they made the separation easier and completer. Even to Roland, brought up as a devout narrow ignorant superstitious sectarian, a change of dynasty hardly meant more than the substitution of James for

George. But the deadness of both mother and son was quickened in March 1745—it was just after Thoresby was burnt to the ground and the yew-tree was in bloom in the garden—by the visit of an unnamed Jesuit priest.

They had had no such attention since that furtive father stole out of the darkness to christen Roland. But this second reverend gentleman rode boldly to the door in lay dress, mounted on a thoroughbred, with a brace of pistols in his holsters and a sword by his side, making altogether a highly cavalierish display of secularity. Indoors Roland could not decide whether he was a quite elderly man or with a claim to be considered doubtfully young, his mood and even his face varying so easily from a fatherly gravity to a modish gallantry, and from this if not to a participation in youthful levities at least to a perfect sympathy with them all. His smooth tact prevented Roland from feeling with so much pain as he must otherwise have done the contrast between his own rusticity and those polished manners, that suave address; but he was stirred up to speak to their priestly guest of taking military service on the Continent. The father dissuaded him at great length but with greater reticence; hinted that a time might again come when a gentleman's sword and courage would be needed nearer home; did not doubt that when it came all of the true faith would rally to the true cause; spoke with a deep-voiced emotion of the French king's religious zeal, and left anybody who would to assume that his most Christian Majesty had undertaken more than he was likely to perform.

For two days he remained, advising, catechizing, absolving, informing; now admiring Mistress Surety's garden, now Mistress Press's housewifery. He found as much to commend in Roland's defective knowledge as in his abounding faith. His conversation was encyclopædic; he not only knew where the Young Chevalier was biding, what the Emperor was saying, what Frederick of Prussia meaning, he could give his hostess the newest tattle about Lady Pomfret and her daughters,

Lady Mary Montagu and her son, Lady Townshend and her flights; and could satisfy her maid all but completely concerning the latest fashion in sleeves and aprons. Above all Fortuna learnt authoritatively that knotting was the usurping queen's favourite fancy-work, as it was her own; whereupon she gave it up for tent-stitching, gave it up instantler, casting shuttle, needle and many-coloured silk into the fire. Moreover the father gave Roland two or three masterly lessons in the use of the broadsword. He slept for two nights in Roland's bed, with many apologies for subjecting him to the discomfort of a shake-down on the parlour floor, then rode away as openly as he had come. He had made Roland a gift of his sword with a neatly turned exhortation to a loyal use of it, and in exchange had Fortuna's draft for twenty pounds on her Nottingham banker.

The next Royal Oak day was not only celebrated by bell-ringing, the usual thanksgiving service at church and patriotic drunkenness out of it, but by the return to the forest of the Gipsies before mentioned, Basil Lee and his daughter, Ethan Lovett and his mother. Abel Marrott, backed by his dog, roughly ejected them from Thieves' Wood, where they had stayed for a day or two the summer before, though there were signs that a large party of nomads had camped there quite lately. Ethan angrily demanded the reason for such a difference in their treatment.

"Because there was five an' thirty on 'em, if yo mun know," answered Abel. "Coom, scaddle! or yo shall hae Tusher at your legs."

Perforce they obeyed, Basil and Alfa in a dignified silence, Ethan and Zuba cursing volubly. They new-pitched their tents half a mile from the Nook, at the Grives, a dingle deeply excavated in the hill-side towards Kirkby by the waters of a streamlet, the first tributary of the baby Erewash. The upper half of this hollow was but sprinkled with trees; in the lower birch, thorn and hazel were so thick together as to make a wood. Thereabouts from time immemorial had been the common

quarrying ground of the villagers for limestone, in sign of which both its sides were partly escarped and the surface of the neighbouring land was gashed and pitted and encumbered with many a heap of stony rubbish. Here and there, where the quarrying had been recent, a naked wound in the bank or a mound of fragments gleamed white, but for the most part the ravages of man had been grassed over, draped in moss or at least so weather-stained that they were at one with the stealthier dilapidations of nature.

Two or three days after the Gipsies had settled there Roland, walking across country towards Pinxton, had his curiosity roused by hearing the squeak of a fiddle. He drew a little aside from his path to the brink of the Grives. Directly under his feet was the rude work of the quarrymen, then a grassy descent to the brook, steep but interrupted here and there by a little platform of level ground. On such a green smooth ledge just below him, near the bottom of the dell, he saw a tent, beside which a man stood and fiddled. A little higher to the left was a clump of thorn-trees white over with bloom. But at first his attention was entirely given to the music, if "given" is the correct term for what was compulsory. That he might hear the better without being seen he stole softly down the bank, easily screening himself behind the roughnesses of the ground or the scattered trees and bushes.

The fiddler had his back to him but the very jig of his elbow suggested mastery. There was such an understanding between player and instrument as if both were parts of the same machine or the same living creature; and the wild lilting raptures which the one drew from the other called to the listener's mind what he had heard of witch-music; for it scarcely seemed possible that such sounds could be born of mere wood and catgut. Now they soared into the squeal of passion, now dropped plumb into a deep-voiced plaint which seemed almost to touch the ground, or they hovered in mid-air making a warbling intricacy of the sweetest notes. It was not in

the least like cotillon, reel, hornpipe or minuet on his mother's harp; he did not imagine it to be dance music, and yet while his ears listened and his mind was captured and his emotions played upon in a manner that astonished, even troubled him, his very feet seemed to expect the summons. All along he heard but had no leisure to attend to a rhythmic tip-a-tap in time to the instrumentation.

At length for a few pulsations the music subsided into an ordinary, in comparison a colourless strain, as though to give performer and listener a minute's rest, and the tip-a-tap accompaniment ceased. Then Roland noticed what he had only seen before, that Basil and Zuba sat on the opposite bank of the streamlet, and their eyes were full of the music they had drunk. The woman was dressed pretty much as before, but the man more meanly, his chief garment being a coarse labourer's smock. But as Roland looked at them the music soared again, as the lark does from the black moist furrow up into the sun-litten blue; and as if the maker had benefited by the short relaxation, it arose with a more extravagant fervour, a more thrilling passion, a wilder zest than ever.

Then however Roland knew that the musician was Ethan. In the midst of his delight he gave his senses a certain liberty of inattention. He perceived that the eyes of the listeners on the bank opposite did not rest on the musician, but as if he were mere accompanist looked away towards the blossomy thorn-tree with an appearance of absorbed interest; and again he heard that faint tip-a-tap in time to the fiddle. Wondering what might be the object of their gaze he went a little further down obliquely to the right, and then saw beyond the hawthorns a girl dancing in the sunshine by the door of a second tent. He took his stand behind a dogwood-tree, whose creamy flowers were still in bud, and seeing her he did not merely see nothing else, properly speaking he did not for the time being hear, smell, perceive, know anything else. The music went through his

brain but as an accessory to her footing ; nothing more than accompaniment was the beauty and fragrance of the trees, the pipe of an unseen bird, the splendour of the sun itself. It was not the bodily agility that caught his eyes and captured his attention. As the poetry of words ran through the music, so did the music and the poetry alike pervade the motions of the dancer. He knelt down to a gap between the lower branches of the bush, so that he might see the better and be seen the less.

Her dancing floor was a mere ledge some two yards wide let into that rustic bank, but its cloth was a living green diapered with daisies, and within those narrow limits she expressed all the languor, tenderness and caprice, all the fervour and ecstasy of the music. Tripping, gliding, motionless save for the rhythmic tremor which ran through her body, darting, floating, swimming, even soaring as it seemed, while her feet and gesticulative hands kept perfect agreement and her eyes glanced or gleamed or languished accordantly with the story of the dance, one time she paced it with a reticent charm, a maiden delicacy which feels but is too modest to show, another time with the slow grace and balanced dignity of a high but repressed passion, which feels but is too proud to speak, and with a languorous tenderness which has nothing but its own depths to conceal. Finally she gave herself up to such a fury of abandonment that her flickering hands and feet mocked the pursuit of his sight, her skirts floated above her knees, her long black tresses tossed and waved and quivered as if each hair of every braid had a mad life of its own, and through them all her eyes darted glances and fire.

During this last movement she left the trodden round in which she had been dancing and had gradually drawn near to Roland's hiding-place, but with such elaboration of advance, pause and retreat as disguised her approach. He did not move ; he thought it impossible for her to be aware of his presence ; besides he could not move. As soon however as the series of artful recurrences had brought her up to the dogwood-tree,

through which Roland was still peering though in some trouble, she suddenly ceased from her measured fury, dropped on her knees before the very gap which served him as peep-hole, and looked him full in the face. The music with one wild discordant wailing note as abruptly stopped. Only then when they were face to face did it come upon Roland, that this corybant was one with the half-child who had been scornfully rejected by him less than two years ago. She looked to have made more than a two year's growth in beauty, grace, understanding and resolution; and he felt, with a half-sweet half-painful thrill that since she had changed so much he too must have changed somewhat. Her eyes were still afire, her hands tremulous, her bosom heaving with the passion of the dance. She held forth her hand, saying: "Come and dance with me."

"I know no dance as you dance," he said with shame-faced humility. "I can but just walk a minuet."

"Come den."

He thought that Gipsy-like missing of the perfect th an added grace. He had no more words to refuse in, and the hand was still held out. As she rose he rose and suffered himself to be led round the dogwood-tree, down to the tents.

"A minuet, Ethan," said Alfa.

"What do I know of Gaujo tunes?" said Ethan contemptuously, and spat upon the ground.

"You know enough. Strike up."

Ethan evidently was minded to persist in an angry refusal, but the girl's eyes were on him. Perhaps too he hoped that the stiff Englishman face to face with the lithe Gipsy would make a ridiculous contrast. The sitters opposite looked on expectantly. He struck up, but first approached so that he was at least as near to Alfa on the one hand as Roland was on the other. He began far too impetuously.

"Too fast, Ethan," said Alfa, and gave him the time with her hand and foot.

"'Tis the pace of a funeral march, not of a dance,"



said he. "And a funeral march it may turn out for one of us," he added under breath.

Nevertheless he accommodated his 'time to the dancers', who first bowing low each to the other went through the slow decorous motions with the composed dignity of high-bred youth and maiden. Roland had been well drilled by his mother, and Alfa without apparent effort subdued her vivacity to the requirements of the measure. At the end of the first figure the on-lookers, who had followed every gesture with Gipsy zest, applauded loudly. Neither the applause nor the performance was to Ethan's liking. His malignity had a vain side to it. Still fiddling he trod the steps of the dance, quite accurately and with much agility but without the proper restraint. Beside the others' decent bearing his seemed the imitative antics of a monkey. Unconscious however of his inferiority he continued fiddling and skipping, while trying in vain to catch Alfa's applauding eye; until in the midst of his self-satisfied dissatisfaction he looked towards the opposite bank, and perceived that even his mother seemed to be unaware of his intrusion into the *pas de deux*. He fell at once out of his vainglory, flung down his bow and rent the strings with his hands. With the cessation of the music the dance ceased. Roland stopped amid the elaborate evolution of a courtly bow to stare at the fiddler.

"They have played dat damned Gaujo tune," said Ethan wrathfully; "they shall never no more play for me."

"As you please," answered Roland loftily; for the glare of the Gipsy's eyes seemed to single him out.

Then he turned again towards where Alfa had stood. But it was too late to finish the incomplete bow, if that was his design; the girl had gone into her tent; the blanket that she had let fall before the door was already settling its folds. Ethan came nearer to renew the altercation.

"What has the Gaujo to do dancing with the Romany chy? Let him dance with his own dear sweet precious

stiff Gaujies, like the fire-poker jiggling round the tongs."

Roland turned away. His slight glance which seemed scarcely to touch the Gipsy yet found a sensitive place in him and goaded him to a more furious volubility. But Roland put that aside, bethought himself, took half-a-crown from his pocket and threw it to Ethan, saying, "That's for the fiddler"; then turned again finally and strode off carelessly up the bank. Ethan pounced upon the coin and seemed about to hurl it after the giver like a materialized harder-hitting curse; but the feel of it made him think better of his purpose. He pocketed the half-crown, but did not for that spare the residue of his fluent malignity. Which, however, since it did not reach the ear to which it was specially addressed, may be classed among the things, not necessarily futile, that have never been uttered.

Next day Roland on his way to Linby, which by the bye lies in the opposite direction to Pinxton, crossed the Grives low down where the trees are thick, but yet within sight of the Gipsies' camp. The tents were gone; there was no sound either of playing or dancing. That being so he did what he had predetermined not to do, went up to the camping-ground. He could distinguish the trodden area of each tent-place, the round of grass charred by their fire, the sward on which Alfa had danced with him. He looked on this so particularly as to fancy that he could distinguish between the daisies signed with his footmark and those bearing her lighter impress. That was all; there was no squalid litter of things rotten, worn out or useless, to mark the place where some half-wild folk had passed a night or two. He went by. He forgot Ethan; an important oversight.

It got about during the day that there had been deer-stealing that night on Papplewick forest, and that stout old Tom Booth, the Nottingham deer-stealer, and Michael Earp, commonly called All-fours, of Kirkby, had been taken up on suspicion. For the next week the Newstead keeper, the Papplewick constable and particul-

arly Abel Marrot were busily going to and fro, searching and questioning ; and in the end Basil Lee and Ethan Lovett were caught at Youldgreave in Derbyshire and together with Booth and All-fours were brought before the local magistrates. Booth was outspokenly indignant that he should be suspected of so unsportsmanlike a deed as to poach in the close season. He was discharged for lack of evidence, as was All-fours without the offer of any, probably for the thrifty reason that his confinement would have thrown a large family on the parish ; but the two Gipsies were committed for trial at the summer assizes.

## CHAPTER V

### THE METHODIST

STILL there were rumours of war and prophecies of change, cold gossip for the most part. If there were a few broken heads, Whig and Tory, got in London street rows, it was more through a brutal lawlessness and the cheapness of gin than political antagonism. Slowly through the thin news-sheets of Nottingham and Derby, or by word of mouth which left out, put in and transformed, came tidings to the forest of the defeat of Fontenoy and the King's departure for the Continent. To get out of the way of danger, said high-flier and flat-nose; to show his contempt of the danger, to raise armies to meet the danger, said the Hanoverian Whig inconsistently. A faint echo of empty words all that, which however gained in sound and seemed to gather a little meaning, when Miller Cowley, on his return from his last visit to Nottingham declared that he had seen in its streets a French general, a sort of fast-and-loose prisoner, a littlish foreign-like man with an extraordinary fine coat on; and especially when it became known that a considerable body of troops, thousands of them, a whole army of them, English and German, had set up their tents on the hills of Wheatley in the north of the county, a few miles aside of the Great North Road and Retford. There was no doubt about that. Master Tutin the Sutton maltster had often been to the Retford hop fair, and it was said had once passed within sight of the camping ground on his way to Gainsborough.

The Nottingham summer assizes, coming on in due time together with the races, cock-fighting, buck-hunting and the usual gay assemblies of gentry and tradesfolk,

*made far more stir than the distant clash of contending factions and empires.* But the case of the *Crown v. Lee* and Lovett did not come on. The king's armies in spite of legal and illegal impressment were greatly in need of able-bodied recruits, but the Gipsy prisoners had with difficulty been persuaded that His Majesty's barracks were a more desirable place of confinement than the county jail, or that a tented field was any freer than the American plantations. At any rate those would be easier to escape from, as probably occurred to them, for at length they consented to take the king's money and don his red livery, they who had hitherto enjoyed a liberty that was almost license. Roland heard much guess-work, cunningly futile, about their present, past and future, but not one word, true or false, concerning Alfa's circumstances. However his curiosity about her was speedily squeezed out by the pressure of weightier matters.

As a rule he avoided the villages on Sunday, for on that day sectarian bigotry, especially of those who never went to church, was most rampant. But on a Sunday a week or two after the assizes, having to go to the lower end of Kirkby for his mother, he determined to call on Jacob Caley's widow, who lived at the upper end near the church, in order to inquire after her health, which had been broken of late, and to leave her a little gift. Every now and then throughout the morning there had been brief perpendicular downfalls of rain, which kept the air fresh though in the intervals the sun shone fiercely; thunder rain, but the centre of the electric disturbance was so distant that no thunder was heard. He went down the waste hill-side where the villagers' cattle were grazing in common; a very gentle slope until he came to the sudden dip into the trough of the valley. There were the ~~ings~~ of rich pasturage about the sources of the Erewash. He jumped the streamlet, then went up ~~on the~~ other side through one of the three enclosures into which all the plough-land of the parish was divided, a wide expanse of fallow cut up into strips by narrow

grassy balks which were then gay with many a weed in bloom, thistle, ragwort, cow-parsnip and bluebell. Coterminous with this on his right lay the field of spring corn, strips of golden rye, strips of whitening oats, dark strips of withering pulse. He crossed the fallows and gained the bottom of the village.

For those times it was a large village, built like a carpenter's square mainly about two roads at right-angles, the one up a gentle rise, the other along the ridge and ending with the church. It was nigh on noon, but the church had not yet given up its worshippers, the ale-houses still held their far more numerous devotees; the rest of the populace had been driven indoors by a heavy shower, and the road was quiet but for the Bacchanalian squeak of Albert Cook's falsetto in the "Foresters' Arms."

As he went on uphill after doing his mother's errand the shower passed. Men, women and children trooped out again, some to take up their gossip where it had been broken off, some to renew their thirst at the public-house, many to play at hop-scotch, leap-frog, chuck or ball, while others retired to some quiet corner to gamble at halfpenny under the hat, keeping a sharp look-out for churchwarden Huff who officially was a stickler for Sunday observance. Roland went through, attracting as little attention as possible but being hit every now and then by an open insult or a privy stone.

At the top of the hill there is a cross so called, though only the rude stump of one, where the road turns sharp to the right for Sutton-in-Ashfield, while on the left lies the rest of the village. There was a man standing on the topmost of the three steps which form the base of the cross, a stranger quite alone. Roland passed on to the left with no more notice than that; but when he had gone a few yards he heard behind him a sudden burst of song, and song which though rude was so loud, so clear, so sure of itself, even so triumphant, that he and many another turned at once to look. They saw an altogether ordinary sort of man, a man neither young nor old,

neither stout nor lean, neither tall nor short, his only peculiarities being a sallow face and a slight stoop. He had bared his head and his hair hung in untidy wisps about his face. His dress was plain and worn and untidily put on, but of somewhat better materials than the homespun of the rustics. Roland judged him to be a framework-knitter from Nottingham or one of the neighbouring villages.

"And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be,  
That Thou, my God, should'st die for me!"

So he sang in a voice much louder and more penetrative than his physique promised, and with such fervour that Roland at once set him down for mad.

"He left his Father's throne above;  
(So free, so infinite His grace!)  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race."

That he was mad seemed to be the first thought of the villagers, who began to crowd up all agape and open-eyed.

"'Tis mercy all, immense and free,  
For, O my God, it found out me!"

One man eased himself of the pain of his wonder with a loud guffaw; another said, "I'll tek my sacrament, 'tis nubbut one o' them Methodisses"; a third looked about for a stone, the primeval argument against all heresy; a fourth jocularly joined in the song, but quite out in words and time and tune; a fifth shouted, "Surry, wheer could I buy a tallow face like thine for to mek rushlights on?" But the man's singing was a thing so apart that the various interruptions did not in the least mar its flow.

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.  
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray;  
I woke; the dungeon flamed with light."

But Roland had had enough; the song offended alike his innate fastidiousness and acquired fanaticism; he turned and walked off up the road, the church spire ever conspicuous in front of him. But the man's voice pursued him, so projected that it lost nothing by distance, while the jeers and cat-calls fell away and left it in sole possession of his ear.

"No condemnation now I dread."

There seemed to him something devilish in its persistence. As fast as he might without appearance of hurry he walked on out of sight of both cross and man; but even as he knocked at Dame Caley's door and entered the audacious climax came to him, as it were assailed him:

"Bold I approach th' eternal throne,  
And claim the crown through Christ my own."

Each word as clear as if he had gathered himself up to receive it. Dame Caley not being well enough to see him, he only stopped for a few minutes in talk with her daughter, then went forth again. The Methodist's psalmody had ceased; there was nobody in sight but the landlord of the "Silent Woman," newly re-christened the "Admiral Anson," who stood pipe in mouth at his own door; the road was quite still again. Nay, even while he turned from the door he caught the faint drone of the final hymn at St. Wilfred's; the twitter of Jack Webster's clarionet a little ahead of the singing, the buzz of Gaffer Tyro's bassoon a little behind, the thin squeak of Barber Brotherton's fiddle sometimes the one and sometimes the other. But the rain coming on again, its mere patter quite drowned the sound. He hastened up the road meaning to get past the church before its congregation was dismissed and return by Castle Hill and the Grives. But just then Abel Marrott came out of the "Admiral Anson" ripely drunk, and straddling across his path began to insult him.

"Hallo, my young papish, and how'sh the Pope thish fine mornin'? Sh'bodikins, I hope he'sh shwelterin' in



hell wi' ne'er a drop o' Nottingham ale to cool his frizzlin' guts."

Roland would not exchange compliments with a man in that condition, and yet could not avoid stopping and hearing.

"Wheer'sh thy p-papish tongue, thou papish mongrel ch-chanceling? Speak when a man speaks to thee, an' speak civil; ecod, thou'd better. Wheer'sh dad-da?"

The occupants of the ale-house had come out and now added the insult of their laughter. Simon Daw, commonly called Slim un, always the last to come and the first to go, stepped briskly out of the church porch. At his heels trooped forth the rest of the congregation. Loath to be seen as party to so disgraceful a disturbance, Roland would have turned back down the road but Marrott held him by his coat. He gave the keeper a thrust in the ribs which made him loose his hold and stagger back, and then said:

"I'll meet you where you like and when you like."

"M-meat?" said the keeper. "What d'yer mane? A dollop o' beef or a mite o' mutton?"

He clenched his great fists and staggeringly put himself in battle order.

"You're drunk," said Roland. "To-morrow, as early as you please."

"To-morrer?" said the keeper. "Nay, I'll hae't now, afore it coolsh; what bit it ish."

But Roland walked away down the street. He was lumberingly followed by Marrott and by his comrades, who urged him on. Marrott stopped presently and said to the nearest of the fellows:

"Shtay, what were that? Did he say as I were d-drunk?"

"Ay, he did," was the unanimous answer.

"Then to show he'sh a liar I'll bash all his t-teeth out."

But the delay had given Roland a start, and when the keeper's backers found that their champion lost ground they began to call after the young man:

"Here, surry! Stop! Art afeard? Coom, yo've

gien the first blow, yo've a raight to gie Abel a chance o' th' next. 'Is them your popery ways? Coom back, or we'll fetch yer. Art gooin' to mass?"

A stone or two was flung after him. At the same time he saw another and much larger crowd coming up the road towards him. Wherefrom there came amid a hubbub of voices one loud clear continuous shout:

"Hallelujah! Glory be to God! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Amen!"

That loud rapturous utterance, being alone distinctly audible, seemed to bring all the other voices into its meaning and make of the whole one triumphant outcry. Roland stood still, in doubt what to make of it, and was overtaken by Abel, who began again to abuse him.

"Now I hae yer," he said, "I'll m-mek an end on yer, yo papish scab; an' the parish'll thank me for the riddance."

He had his great brown hairy fists ready squared to second his words. Roland, seeing no escape from the disreputable challenge, turned and without lifting hand looked straight into his opponent's eyes.

"Praise be to God! Blessed be the Lamb for ever! Amen and amen and amen!"

The keeper's attention was turned, was arrested; he stared in a drunken wonder. On they came, one man and a mob of some hundred men, women and children; whereof each man, woman or child was beating the one with fist or stick, pelting him with stones, bedaubing him with mire, or at least bawling after him, before him, on either side of him, from a distance or into his ear unspeakable obscenities and blasphemies tempered with common abuse. Yet from his mouth ever issued that exultant pæan.

"Hoo! Boo! Shoo!" variously howled, squealed, yelled, hissed the rabble. "Out wi' yer! Begone wi' yer! We'll hae no damned Methodiss Jacks 'ere! Down wi' prayer and preachin'! Back to yer frame or to hell! We're all for King Georgie an' the Protestant religion!"

No Pretender, no wooden shoes! We're Christians, we are!"

Roland now recognized the central figure as that loud singer at the cross. His face was marked with blood, his clothes were rent, disordered and defiled, but in his sallow uplifted face was a light which did not seem native to it, as regardless of blow and revilement he cried:

"Thanks be to God, who giveth huz the 'vict'ry through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

A thin elderly man, a lath of a man, named Lidgett, who having once been a running footman to the Duke of Kingston went by the nickname of Leg-it, came out of a neighbouring cottage with a vessel full of the filthiest filth and cried:

"Wheer's your Methodiss? I've often heerd talk on 'em, I've nivver yit seed one."

Various voices answered emulously:

"That's him!"

"'E says 'e's coomed 'ere for to convart uz from the horror o' gooin' to church."

"An' th' ale-'us."

"Then," said the new-comer, "I'll fresh-christen 'im. It'll be a stronger dab nor any watter nor holy ghost nayther."

So saying he emptied his vessel over the man's head. For the moment his loud pæan was stifled; whereat his persecutors laughed and filthily railed on him. Roland stepped aside in much disgust both of the enthusiast and his ill-treatment; but Abel stood directly in his way, looking at him with a beer-drenched puzzlement, into which however some broken deceptive light was at last penetrating.

"Art a Methodiss?" he said. "Ay, y'are; yo nedn't answer, yo st-stink on't."

He seized the Methodist by the jacket and stayed him. The crowd took his part and shouted:

"Belt 'im well, Abel. Larn 'im his cat'chism, Abel. Lam into 'im, Abel. Don't ler 'im goo, Abel, while yo've fetched 'im out'n his skin."

"I wain't mishtreat yer," said the keeper; "yo've gotten your bellyful o' that. I'll just sh-shake it out on yer; as if 'twere muck out'n a rotten oad sack."

So saying, Marrott putting forth all his strength lifted the stranger by his clothes and shook him violently, shook him until his jacket cried rip and parted at the seams. Then he let him go.

"How d'yer feel now?" he said. "S-some on't win-dered<sup>1</sup> out on yer? To-morrer, yo'll thank me, as sure's my name's Abel Marrott."

The Methodist had at last recovered his voice, and used it with a loud solemnity which compelled mockery to give him at least one ear.

"Nay," said he, "thy name has hitherto been Cain, but Abel it shall be. Thou shalt be the first i' this place to call on the name o' the Lord and cry, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Then shall the master of the feast say unto thee, 'Friend, come up higher.' But not without blood. For Cain moot first slay Abel."

Marrott flushed a wrathful crimson. Furious at hearing familiar understandable words set to a meaning obscurely evil, he clenched his ready right hand and shouted:

"Dost say as I'm C-Cain? o Blood an' wownds! I'll larn thee to call me out o' my Chrishian name; I'll larn thee to call me Cain. C-Cain yoursen, yo——"

Before he had found epithet had enough the big angry fist shot out at the impulse of his drunken madness and struck the Methodist between the eyes. The Methodist fell backwards and lay like a dead man. Most of the bystanders thought he was dead. Their abusive voices lapsed; their intemperate passions were neutralized by the intrusion of a sudden horror, a pity, a selfish fear. Marrott stood over him with clenched fist, straddling wide, understanding nothing but perhaps obscurely feeling somewhat of the common dread.

"Ger up again, man," he said, "so's I can gie yer all yo've a raight to."

<sup>1</sup> Winnowed.

"Nay, man Abel," said one, "yo've gied 'im thumping good measure a'ready."

"Your forest foot's a foot and a hafe," said another.

"Ay, yo've sattled 'im proper," said a third.

"Yo've hafe killed 'im," said a fourth.

"Yo've killed 'im quite," said a fifth.

So the frost on their voices being suddenly thawed, a murmurous hubbub witnessed to the relief which each felt in uniting to accuse. Amid which somebody asked:

"Is't the Shropshire prophet, think ye?"

And presently everybody was saying, "It's the Shropshire prophet."

So the voices went on:

"Then Abel mun look to hissen."

"How awful still 'e ligs!"

"A man shouldn't be so lungeous."

"This comes o' tekkin' a tinety little too much."

"'E don't oppen 'is eyes."

"And wain't."

"Wheer's the constable?"

The last word cried out to one and all of the danger there was in not taking sides.

"I'm gooin' to fetch 'im," said one.

"I'll goo wi' yer," said another.

Two or three others started on the same errand without the delay of speech. Roland strode into the middle of the road and confronted them. His anger against their common cruelty and cowardice was perhaps abetted by his self-contempt at the lateness and futility of his interference.

"You helped to kill him," he said. "So did you, and you, and you. You're all murderers."

"I just scutched<sup>1</sup> 'im wee't," said the foremost, dropping a thatch-peg; "an' 'teen't noat but a lat<sup>2</sup> as yer might say."

Others made a like haste to accuse themselves.

"I nubbut touched 'im wi' my bare hand."

"A dob o' soft dirt couldn't hurt nubbody."

<sup>1</sup> Switched.

<sup>2</sup> Lath.

"I just hulled<sup>1</sup> like the tothers did; and didn't hit noat nayther."

"I shouted at 'em to let the poor man be."

"Any'ow 'teen't no consarn o' mine."

The last speaker was not the first to withdraw his interest and presence. They showed a common readiness to take the nearest way each to his own door. The crowd melted away and left the constable to inform himself by his own official instinct.

"Yo're i' th' raight, lad," said Leg-it. "I meant nabeut a bit of a wettish lark, an' I've larked mysen into murder. What'll the missis say?"

He went back into his house hanging his head. There was nobody about the prostrate body but Marrott at his feet, Roland at his head, and on either side of him Marrott's little three-year-old Molly and Tom Sainty, the village wastrel; who having neither goods, character nor so far as he knew soul to lose, but only a poor crazy uncared-for body, stood his ground unconcerned about consequences. The last few drops of rain had fallen; the sun again shone out, beaming with a godlike impartiality on the PK in red stitched to the booby's right shoulder, sign of his pauperism, on Roland's clenched hands, on the child's flaxen hair, on the Methodist's head laid back in a rain-puddle, on his assailant's face looking down at him. The keeper's furious crimson was reduced to a blotchy purple-grey, and he muttered as if in self-communion:

"Lifts nayther hand nor foot. As still as a stun. Dead. Then who did it?" He said again louder, as if claiming an answer, "Who did it?"

"Yersen did," answered Tom Sainty, kicking a stone away with one cobbled shoe. "A proper un an' all; a fair socker atween his two oys. All th' oad women i' th' parish couldn't a laid 'im out stiffer an' better."

"Me?" said Marrott in a still only half-awakened dread. "I'd begun to be afeared— But the ~~men's~~ a poor sap-headed cratur, noat to be depended on." He looked

<sup>1</sup> Threw.

over the body at Roland. "Yo're a scholar. Tell me. Who did it?"

"Huth, daddy!" lisped the three-year-old, and lifted her warning hand. "Man gone beebye. Huth!"

As she shook her head her flaxen hair flickered in the light as if it too were sun-born. Roland had not spoken, but something must have passed between them which Marrott took as an answer, for he said in a low slow unsteady voice:

"D'yo mean to say as 'twere me?"

"Yes," said Roland.

"Then wheer was I when I did it? I moot a bin gone away. Can they mek me 'countable for't?"

"I don't know," said Roland in a shaky voice, for the man's trouble troubled him.

"Yo're a scholar; mek it yer business for to know."

"You were drunk."

"Then I shall be damned for't, surelye."

"That's about it," said Tom Sainty; "hanged fust an' damned afterwards. Bu'eels they skins."

The keeper's eyes fell again upon the senseless body and with a quickened horror.

"Man—if yo be a man," he said, "oppen your eyes, look at me, curse me down to hell. Any sort o' look ud be better nor them eyelids. Oh, what hae I done? What hae I done?" He fell on his knees at the Methodist's feet and cried with a loud and fully awakened voice, "What shall I do to be saved?"

The dead eyelids came to life again as if at that loud appeal. Little Molly clapped her hands and said:

"Beebye gone! Man wake! Peep-boh!"

"What shall I do to be saved?" reiterated the keeper.

Said the Methodist still as he lay, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

"My house I care noat for, it belongs the duke, but if yo know a tex' as'll bring this little un in, I should be firs' an' beg to hear on't."

"Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

"Dost hear, Molly?" said the keeper. "That's all for thee. Heaven's the good place."

"Now," said the Methodist, "help me up, friends, for I've but a slack ho'd on the reins o' my feet."

Roland and Tom Sainty gave him the help he needed; as for Marrott he was still on his knees.

"S'help me, surry!" said Tom. "What meks yer sweg<sup>1</sup> so? Hae yer crammed all yer pockets wi' word o' God?"

"Ay, lad, an' my innards an' all," said the Methodist.

"Oat of a taste?"

"The contrairy of the angel's little book; bitter to the mouth but sweet as honey i' the belly."

Tom shook his head.

"Nay, I allus judges by the mouth; belly mun tek care o' hissen."

Marrott rose to his feet, trembling. Molly, unheeded, tried to wipe the mud off his knees with her little pinner.

"Don't let me goo, friends," said the Methodist; "I feel like to swownd again."

Marrott put aside his trembling and clasped him under the arm-pits; Roland and Tom took each a leg, and so they bore him to the nearest cottage, Leg-it's as it happened. It was pretty to see the little one put up both her tiny hands and help daddy to support his end of the weight. Leg-it's wife opened the door and they went in just as the rector, who was also a justice of the peace, came down the road attended by the warden and the clerk. Before his portly cassocked presence and severe aspect the road was clear; but when he turned the corner, without hurrying his stately advance he overtook old Nick Bradley, who was stiff with rheumatism, and young Joe Kipping, who had lingered too long over the strong October of the "Blue Boy." The one he fined a shilling on the spot for non-attendance at church, and the other he committed to the stocks for drunkenness.

"Coom in," Mrs. Lidgett had said, "~~the~~ Lay 'im on this langsettle.<sup>2</sup> 'E looks badly, but I'm glad it's

<sup>1</sup> Sag, hang heavily.

<sup>2</sup> A kind of wooden sofa.



no worse. My mester's i' th' chamber, prayer-mad. Hark!"

Through the stair-door, which opened into the house-place, they could hear the man praying above with a loud but broken utterance.

"Lord, save me from hangin'. For th' oad missis's sake. She belongs a respectable fam'ly, as has nivver hed no truck wi' the gallers. Lord, save me from such a ill-convenient unlikeable sort o' death. Lord, bring the man to life again. Thou canst as aisy as winkin'. For the missis's sake! An' Jesus Christ an' all. Amen. Or if such uns as yo don't think much to oad women, and I can't deny but what they bain't much to look at, Lord, do it again the day o' joodgment. It'll be a terrible throng time wi' yer all, and 'twill be non the wuss for yer to hae a few o' these measly little jobs done afore-hand. Amen."

His wife went to the stair-door and called up.

"Mester! Thou'rt wastin' breath. The man's alive a'ready. Stop thy clapper an' coom down."

The man sprang up; they heard him; heard a hurried blundering down the stairs, and into the room he burst, his eyes wild with an unexpected expectancy. He dropped on his knees beside the langsettle and cried with uplifted hands and face:

"Lord, yo've done it! I thank yer. I know 'twarn't on my account but them tothers' I mentioned. But all the same I thank yer kindly for this good turn; and what amends a such un as me can mek to a such un as yo, mek I will."

Abel Marrott said, "I'm another; I say amen to that;" and knelt where he had stood.

Little Molly knelt beside him, likewise held up her dimpled hands to heaven and laughed and uttered sweet prayer-prattle.

"Kneeling seems to be the fashion," said the housewife. "Well, I know the floor's clean."

She knelt beside her husband. Tom Sainty seemed uneasy at being left out.

"Dang it," said he, "it's as aisy as stanning. Any'ow it's a change."

He too knelt. The stricken Methodist was revived by the sight of those kneeling five as no medicaments could have revived him. He stood up and with hands outspread over them, head and spirit uplifted above them, prayed as they had never heard prayer before, in their own familiar language but occupied and possessed by an altogether unfamiliar inspiration. Roland drew back to the door and listened, half in the house, half out on the road. But soon he began to feel such strange stirrings and drawings, he knew not whence, knew not whither, that he feared the heretic was using some illicit influence upon him. He walked away out of the reach of it. The others remained, and of them were the beginnings of Methodism at Kirkby.

The revivalist was a stockinger of Basford named Simpson, so it was said at the "Admiral Anson" that night, with many an oath and loud committal of him to the hottest of places. Ted Crabb, solitary in the contrary opinion, swore back with his usual freedom. For which he was presented by the churchwarden to the next quarter sessions for blasphemy in an ale-house on the Lord's day, and was fined a shilling.

## CHAPTER VI

### TANDEM TRIUMPHANS

NEXT day Abel Marrott seemed bent upon seeing Roland, for he kept in sight of the Nook from the beginning of the morning twilight till seven o'clock, when he espied him conspicuous on the ridge of the Robin Hood hills crossing as if for Blidworth, and hastened to meet him. He too was seen by Roland, who however took no pains to get out of his way. Instead of firing a volley of long-range oaths followed by more particular vituperation at close quarters, he waited until he could utter a remonstrance not uncivil although loud and peremptory. Roland wondered what had happened to him.

"I tho't yo unnerstood, Roland Surety, as yo was discharged from hauntin' this 'ere forest?"

"What harm am I doing, prithee?" said Roland, who always put on his best English to him.

"Scarrin' the king's deer for one thing."

"There are no deer at present, as perhaps you do not know, nearer than Mansfield forest or Papplewick."

"No matter for that; yo've no raight to trespass here, an' if you wain't be said I shall present yer to the verderers again. But that can lay by for a bit; it een't what I'm bent on sayin' to yer just now. Roland Surety, yo gied me a meetin' for to-day. I've non forgotten; m'appen yo hev."

"I beg your pardon, I did not understand you to accept it. However——"

Before more words were out Roland had his coat off.

"Nay, 'twouldn't be no fair faight. Yo've coom on wunnerful sin our little set-to, but yo hain't the weight. I should knock yer out in five minutes."

"Try it."

"Nay, I liked a bit o' fist-work once—the day afore yisterday; but now I've done wi' all that, faightin', swearin' and randyin', for ivver and ivver, amen. I've put off th' oad man; though it seems to me as 'young man' ud be a more properer name for 'im, he's that lusty. Roland Surety, I've gied yer a many hard words an' not a few hard knocks. I've axed forgiveness o' th' heavenly Fayther, an' I've gotten it. I've gotten it! God be thanked, I've the witness o' the Sperrit to that. But I can't be content wi'out yo forgie me an' all. Will yer?"

Roland eyed the speaker with a dislike troubled by surprise. Short of dumbness there is no human being so speech-bound as a reserved hobbledehoy unexpectedly faced by an incomprehensible emotion. Marrott had to urge him once and again with a "Wain't yer?" and "Coom, ya moan't malice me for't," before he could reply with the barest monosyllable of consent.

"Then yo'll shake hands wi' me?"

Roland shook hands, but coldly. Abel was not so dense or thick-skinned but he found something wanting both to the word and the touch.

"Yo do't freely?" he asked.

"Certainly," answered Roland.

"Thankee for that. But I shan't have unloaded mysen unless I warn yer an' beg yer to flee like me from the wrath to coom."

Roland thought he referred somehow to the impending political trouble, and was more frozen up than ever. He began to move away; slowly, lest it should look like a retreat. The rest of the colloquy was from ever increasing distances at an ever higher pitch.

"Ah, yo're bound 'and and foot to the bloody Pope o' Rome."

"I would sooner be bound to His Holiness than to your Mr. John Wesley."

"Mester Wesley's a man coom straight from God with a message for huz poor sinners."

"He tells you so."

"No, the word o' God tells uz so; an' it tells uz the Pope is a devil an' the fayther on 'em."

The reciprocal shout to which they had then got might be taken either to have flared up at the blast of passion or to have sprung from a fervent desire to be doctrinally edifying.

"If you mean the Bible——"

"Even a Papish might know that."

"It says that His Holiness hath the keys of heaven and earth given him."

"That's a Papish lie."

"Claves regni coelorum."

"That's all soft furren gabble; it een't the Bible. The Bible's ourn, it een't yourn; 'tis a blessed English Protestant book."

"Much you know. 'Twas wrote in Latin for us; t' St. Moses."

The interval was now too great to be bridged by the most resonant of religious controversies; but in the hope that a secular gird might arrive where spiritual expostulation had come short, Abel bawled at the top of his voice:

"Don't let me—cop yer here—again. Yo're warned."

But however much the keeper might be wanting in the temper and skill proper to a dialectician, it is certain that the little world about him was the gainer by his new-come enthusiasm. His language was purified of obscenity, he frequented instead of the orgies of the alehouse the daily religious exercises at his own or Leg-it's cottage, he visited and succoured the poor, he kept his hands under control if not always his tongue, had been hit on the back of the head with a stone and checked himself at the half-turn in time to escape seeing his assailant. Wherefore he had been publicly rebuked by the rector for his bad exchange of a pardonable ~~carelessness~~ of practice for a damnable laxity of doctrine.

Really there was no time in all the year when the minds of our Nottinghamshire folk were easier or their

tongues less excited. The king lingered on the Continent. Fontenoy was all but forgotten, there was no mustering of hostile ships at Brest, the French invasion was hardly even talked of. The Duke of Newcastle came a-hunting to the forest; and when he departed left no gossip behind him but of the splendour of his following and the number of harts that had fallen to them, all warranted, all harts of ten or more, one being of fifteen and an offer. Expectancy seemed to have been seized with the languor of decadent summer, as the wheat turned from green to the pale promise of harvest, and watchers had to sound their horns by day and keep up roaring fires all night to scare the ravenous deer from the crops.

It was a sunny day past the middle of August, and Roland had been angling for coarse fish in the still waters of the Dover Beck by Grimesmoor on the east of the forest. On his return with but a light bag he crossed the south-western corner of Newstead by the footpath from Papplewick. The forest rose high on his right hand but he approached it on its lowest side, and almost as soon as he went under the trees there was a dip to make a channel for the Leen. Just beyond the little river, in a hollow, the site of an ancient quarry but long since given up to woodland, were his friends the licensed charcoal-burners plying their craft. There were only the two brothers left, Matthew and Mark; the father, old Gadley, had died. Sooty-browed men they were, with red lids to their bleared eyes and horny skins to their scorched hands. Each had a tangled beard, wore a grimy cotton handkerchief knotted about his head, a pair of singed leathern breeches and a dingy woollen shirt, checked or red, with open breast showing the dark hairy skin beneath. The marks of the weather and their trade were so heavy on them that the marks of age were obliterated, and they might have passed as brothers to their dead sire. They had already planted a stake in the midst of a pit and built against it a pile of oaken slivers as high as themselves. Roland seated himself on a

felled trunk at the top of the bank and watched them cover it with turves cut ready to hand; while they in turn chuntered to him obliquely about the warmth of the day and the chilliness of the night, about the decay of the forest and their craft. They seemed to relish the change from the day-long monotony of chuntering directly at each other.

Their rude temporary hut was in sight between one huge oak and another; its supports of oaken stakes, its walls of heaped brushwood, its roof carelessly thatched with ling. The smouldering fire before it glared dully like a sleepy red-hot eye. The thin smoke from two completed piles went straight up above the trees and then turned over; the red gleam of the setting sun flashed between the ancient tree-trunks and athwart their ephemeral leafage. In that dusky woodland it especially lighted up the bole of a tree recently barked by the friction of a stag's antlers. It made much of the white on a magpie which had alighted for a minute on an outstanding branch. The sky showed its luminous pale blue in parcels through the tree-tops. The scanty herbage underfoot, the dog's mercury, angelica, wood-betony, garlic were somewhat sobered of their day-colouring. A squirrel which never left the nearest tree by turns scolded fiercely and chattered genially. Said one of the brothers—he was ten years younger than the other, but the difference which that should have made was grimly concealed—he said looking across at Roland:

"I do feel some dry; I could drink a gallond o' six-penny stale small beer."

"He drank all that and more yisterday at the 'Silent Woman,'" said his snarling senior, looking the same way.

"What a mortal pity 'tis that what a man drinks is clean lost for ivver!" said Mark.

"What would the boafin hae?" said Matthew.

"I'd hae it sipe through him so's it could be caught as good's ivver an' used again."

"He'd still hae all the 'casion for a Monday thirst."

"I shouldn't mind that if I hed the cure for't so handy."

"He's a swine."

"There's a pig by me o' the same litter."

"He's a ligger."

"'Twere our Mat as larnt me. Oddzooks, I'll ne'er deny but what he's my mester."

The elder seemed to be giving all his attention to the heap.

"It'll do," said he.

"Sam Baxter's 'listed," said the younger. "He were theer yisterday wi' the king's colours on 'im and a skinful o' the king's beer in 'im."

"The more fool him."

"Nay, ecod, not a grain; he'd no room for't."

Roland was watching the hold timidity of some rabbits at play among the trees. The charcoal-burners, having completely covered the pile with turves, drew the stake out, leaving a vent through the midst of it, then sat on the ground and rested. By which time the sun's fiery gleam had softened to a glow. Matthew first examined his scorched and horny fingers one by one with a minute particularity, then said:

"Keeper Marrott hain't quite lost the proper use o' his fisses sin 'e turned Methodiss."

"Why should he?" said Roland.

"There een't no need for to considdy that," said Mark, "if 'e hain't."

"I wish he'd let somebody spake a word," said his elder surlily, still to Roland, athwart.

"Nobody's a-hinderin' nayther yo nor him," said Mark.

"An' that nobody's hissen," said Matthew.

"Ecod, I'm glad on't, if our Mat's that somebody."

"What were you saying about Marrott?" asked Roland.

"I were sayin', when this burrerbo't<sup>1</sup> balked me," answered Matthew, "as Weems the woodward o' Sutton—he's a faightin' cock, yer know——"

<sup>1</sup> A harum-scarum sort of person.



"I know," said Roland.

"Well, the Suttoner met him on th' road this side o' Fulwood, Sat'dy was a week, an' begun for to roil him about his—what the devil do they call it? Confusion?"

"Conversion I believe," said Roland scornfully.

"I knowed it were summat o' that. Weems begun for to roil him about his con—conversation. He tho't mebbe as Abel ud bear it like a cade lamb, same as Stockinger Simpson does. But the keeper ups and gies him such a hidin' as nobody niver heerd tell on. Then when the Suttoner owned to haein' a bellyful an' a bit for luck he says, 'I done it for the good o' your poor soul,' he says, 'an' not becous I'm the laste radgy.'<sup>1</sup> An' that were trew enough seeminglye, for Abel used to be a wild hammer-an'-tongs sort o' faighter, lungeous like, but Weems acknowledges as he toimed them two black oys he gied him an' that dab i' th' mug as cool an' beautiful as oat ivver were seed. 'Now,' says he, say<sup>2</sup> Abel, 'yo mun coom wi' me to wer prayer-meetin' at Leg-it's.'"

"Did he goo?" asked the younger.

"Yo'd 'ear if so be as yo'd listen. Goo? Ay, he did goo; an' what the pain o' the tanning he'd just hed an' what the long an' strong words Leg-it put into his prayers, he hedn't beeg theer foive minutes afore he were down on 's hams blubberin' like a lost babby for its mammy."

"The parson ull be hotter again 'em nor ivver."

"He's no call for to complain; he gets his toithes 'owsumdiver."

"Ay, i' fackins; they said yonner as Mester Cowley's were the fift toithe pig he'd hed i' th' fortnit."

"It's a marcy we don't hae to pay toithe o' wer teeth. We should if 'e fun it cheaper or any road easier nor raisin' some o' his own."

"It may coom to that. They say as the blacksmith

<sup>1</sup> Angry, enraged.

has drored two o' hisn, back uns an' all, i' the few years he's bin at Kirkby."

"What made all this blether about the parson?"

"Can't just say." Mark smeared his sweaty brow with his red shirt-sleeve, while his glance wandered purposelessly through the sunlit green of the trees, over the darkling green of the grass. "Ah, but I can though; 'twere---- Yo wouldn't a tho't as the blew o' yon jay-bird ud show that far off."

But before the others could look or decline to look, the jay descreying them had fled clamorous. The brothers rose and set to work again, the elder to kindle a fire under the just-completed pile, the younger to clear out a pit for the next; whereat they seemed to forget the parson. Said Matthews presently:

"That baker-kneed furren chap as Just-so has tekken on has the smallpox, an' badly an' all."

"He'd better hae noat. Wheer did yer hear that?"

"Not at th' ale-hus."

"We were talkin' about the parson, warn't uz?"

The other did not answer. Roland's eyes were following the gyrations of a flight of gnats between him and the sun. Presently Mark looked up again and said:

"Two's drawin' too fierce."

He stuck his spade in the ground, filled a pail with water from the lake, and going to one of the lighted piles, which had begun to smoke more than a little, doused it from above. Matthew was busy thrusting dry leaves and twigs into a small aperture left in the base of the newly-built pile. The younger returned, took his spade again and said:

"Somebody bro't 'im up, talkin' about his sarmon o' that very mornin'."

"A silver groat that were the bobber."

"No, 'twarn't. It were a man yo'd nivver suspicion on't."

"Ah?"

Mark went to the fire before their hut, took thence a smouldering brand, quickened it to a blaze by brandish-

ing it, lighted therewith the kindling with which his brother had charged the pile, then said :

"It were All-fours."

"Him?"

"Ay. He didn't gie out as he heerd it hissen."

"I should believe it as soon if 'e hed."

"He got it second or third-'and. I warn't that partic'lar to ax 'ow."

"If yo can't say how mebbe you can say what."

"The parson 'nounced atween his tex' an' his firstly, afore anybody'd hed time to forgit wheer he wor, 'cept oad Gaffer Goodyer as, hes a gift and nivver remembers noat, he 'nounced as him he called the Young Defender, but oad Madam Chaworth she used t<sup>o</sup> call him the Shoveller, for I heerd her——"

"What do you call him?" asked Roland.

"Nay, I'll call him when I want him. Any'ow he gied out as he's marched wi' twenty thousand Frenchmen into Scotland to a wild-like unhabitable place they calls the Grumpous mountains."

"Ay? That's a sight o' Froggies, twenty thousand. I reckon it ud be welly nigh all there is on 'em. One's burnt out, een't it?"

"Ay," said the junior, and took up a shovel which rested against the next tree.

"Nay, it's blind man's halliday; we'd better be doin' noat." Mark put back the shovel. "Did 'e say oat else, the parson?"

"'E axed 'em to pray as raight might hae the best on't. But 'e didn't say which were raight."

"That shows as he'd bide content wi' ayther. Were that a goat-sucker as glid by so still?"

"Ay."

"Is that all?"

"'Cept the sarmon. But yo'll hae to goo otherwheers nor to All-fours for that."

As soon as the sun had gone down behind the Robin Hood hills it was night in that hollow. In a few minutes nothing reminded them of day but glimpses through the

trees of the sky still palely luminously blue overhead, still triumphing in purple and crimson in the west, but not with the triumph of life; rather was that gorgeous air-woven fabric like the royal purple borne along over an illustrious death. Eastward there were but a few snatches visible of an uncontending grey; an exposition of how soon yon red-hot fame will cool down to a half-remembrance. The charcoal-burners slowly, like weary men to whom even cessation is a labour, gathered their tools up, went to their hut and began to prepare their scanty evening meal of rye bread soaked in skim milk. Roland walked homewards.

His mind was so full of the news from the north that he did not hear a herd of deer feeding among the thick of the trees, daintily sniffing and snatching at the dry oak leaves, grazing the limp grass and succulent ivy. He came out into the open by the quarries and hardly saw a swan fly past from the lower lake; hardly saw it and did not as usual follow its low flight, listening to the whistle of its wings as long as eye and ear together could make anything out. But immediately afterwards he was brought out of himself by a loud disagreeable voice.

"Stop, you lout, and pay me proper respect."

It was the lord of Newstead whom he was walking by without notice. Roland stopped, but paid him no respect beyond a look as haughty and angry as his own. His lordship doubtless had also heard the news, and looked mightily put out.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Roland Surety, my lord."

"The purley-dame's whelp? Then I believe I have warned you off my land."

"What's your reason, my lord, for stopping me where nobody else is stopped?"

"If I choose to do it without a reason what have you to say?"

"Only, my lord, that it will be the more fitting."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nay, my lord, if you claim to act without reason you must not require me to speak with it."

"Hark ye to this: I'll allow no passage this way for chance-gotten vagabonds or Popish bastards."

"If I am one you are one."

"You foul-mouthed young dog!"

Byron lifted his cane. Roland clubbed his fishing-rod. His weapon had decidedly the advantage in weight. They eyed each other, the one threateningly, the other defiantly.

"Do you know what I would do," said his lordship, "if I had a sword on me?"

"Ay; what you wouldn't do if I had one too."

Lord Byron looked around; there were none of his hirelings at hand to back up his ordinary breath with effective force. He was reduced to reiterate a threat.

"I dare you to come this way again."

"My lord, I hold myself dared. Your lordship's humble servant."

Roland walked off without haste, while his lordship stood with nothing to look at but his back in a fury of arrogance and defeat. His own temper did not recover from that sorry ruffling until he reached his mother's presence. She was outside her garden gate enjoying the extensive quiet. His thoughts, jumping what was idle or ignoble, immediately went back to more important matters. Or if his indignation was not altogether allayed it was transferred from his own to the public account, and maybe gave some of that martial ring to his voice and fire to his eye as he told her of the Kirkby parson's sermon. She clasped her hands over her bosom with a nunc-dimittis fervour. With foreign aid so potent the cause seemed as good as won. But in a few minutes her belief and enthusiasm had evaporated. It seemed so unreal. The evening breeze hardly stirred the bluebells. Gently dealt the shadows with the earth, delicately glowed the light in the sky, the line of the hills was not blurred; for night as yet lay light upon every-

thing, and especially upon a white foxglove at Fortuna's feet. The tinkling bell borne by the leader to a string of pack-horses somewhere to windward, the whistle of their driver, the idle crack of his whip, the bark of one dog as far off as Annesley Woodhouse, the caw of one laggard rook high overhead, the thin squeak of one bat flitting to and fro, sometimes almost within arm's-reach—all this was but the summing up of a silence. A piece of news like that ought to have been prefaced by a popular uproar such as would have shaken the content even of nature. Again and again she said that she could not believe it.

Nevertheless later in the evening it set her retailing by candlelight her childish recollections of the 'Fifteen, for which one of her uncles had suffered, doubtfully fortunate in this, that it was not on the scaffold but by the malaria of Newgate. Roland listened eagerly but without making any personal application of the theme. At the end he said with some hesitation :

"It hardly seems that the people were very keen to welcome their king back."

"The king shall enjoy his own again," squeaked the parrot.

"You're judging, child," said Fortuna, "by this atheist county, where the spirits of the natives are as tame as the ground they tread on."

"To my mind 'tis a beautiful country."

"Ah, but if you had seen the mountains, moors and valleys of our own place——"

There came a veil over Fortuna's eyes, as when one sees what is afar better than the things that are near.

"Even there they seem not to have risen but by twos and threes."

"When shall we three meet again?" croaked the parrot.

"We had not the Frenchmen then."

"Well, Scotchmen may think well to shake hands with French soldiers on Scotch ground, but if ever they dare come to England——"

The young man checked himself and his mother filled the gap her own way.

"You will remember what the reverend father said, and look on them as angels sent from heaven for our redemption."

"I'm mightily afeared, mother, I shall be thinking most of King Lewis, who, I trow, has small dealings with angels."

"Of course, child, when the king has got his own again they'll at once be sent back."

"To heaven? Well, I own I shall like 'em better there."

By way of answer or instead of it Fortuna sat to her harp, and in a voice still clear and a manner still youthful sang :

"The man in the moon may wear out his shoon  
By running after Charles's wain ;  
But all to no end, for the times will not mend  
Till the king enjoys his own again."

She sang—

"Young Jammy is a lad that's royally descended,  
With ev'ry virtue clad, by ev'ry tongue commended."

Then at Roland's asking she sang the ballad of the Derby hills, but whether purposely or through forgetfulness she left out the stanza which declared—

"No married man nor no widow's son  
Will I ever ask to go with me ;  
For I will take no widow's curse  
From the Derby hills that are so free."

Roland did not forget or neglect Lord Byron's challenge. About noon of the following day he dressed in his best and girt on the reverend father's sword, with a fervour of sentiment which in some strange way and unfixed proportion seemed to be shared between a personal and a national resentment. Thus armed and habited he stole out by the back door so that his mother should not see, and walked across Newstead by the

Papplewick footpath. He met nobody but Keeper Ellis, a lanky long-tongued ease-loving likeable man.

"I've stret orders gien for to stop ye, Roly," he said, "an' tek yer afore his lordship."

"Stop me then," said Roland as fiercely as he might.

"Well, I've a gun again your sword. Sin that's your choice nobody can't say it een't fair. But I've niver been used to being chopped at with a sword, an' I feel mysen getting too oad to be larnt to do 't wi' any comfort. Likeways I don't fancy mysen shooting at yo. I should feel awk'ard, like I'd lost my trigger-finger. Moreover I've a wife; she'd miss nagging at me if I were gone. And how do I know but what I should miss being nagged at? Yo've a mother too, and I'll warrant there's summat i' yo, summat good or summat damned bad, as she'd be sorry to be quite shut on. So if yer moot goo, goo. Yo wain't want your sword, 'cept mebbe for trimming to your fine coat. His lordship's gone to Nottingham about the news, and nayther Joe nor Jack wain't see yer. I'faith their eyes are so bad, both on em's, this mornin', I doubt yo couldn't mek 'em see yer unless yo jobbed your fist or sword smack into their eyes."

"I don't particularly want to go this way," said Roland, "only——"

"On'y somebody partic'lar wants yer not to? Well, lad, I hain't been gien that sort o' sense or them fine feelings as ud mek me do mysen a hurt because somebody else says 'don't.'"

Roland felt the tyranny of his indignation give way. He returned, stole into the house again by the back door, took his sword off and much to his comfort changed his best for everyday clothes. After that he crossed Newstead as usual whenever it lay in his way. Ellis and his underlings easily succeeded in not seeing him and he never met their master; who as a fierce supporter of the Whig oligarchy was much concerned in the political situation. He had just been put in the commission of the peace, and besides the preoccupation of



other county business which took him often from home, he bore a considerable part in the raising of the Duke of Kingston's regiment. Amid it all he had not forgotten Roland, his arrogance had been too rudely shocked for that. We may take it that he saw no reason to suspect that his orders were being so slackly carried out.

Meanwhile popular excitement went no further than a rivalry of shouting and song-singing, even before it came out, as by degrees it did, that Charles Edward had come with nothing but French promises to back his English hopes. By and by the *Nottingham Courant*, the *Derby Mercury* passed slowly from hand to hand, with a paragraph or two of windy despatches, reports or letters, clumsily trying to make the threatened danger conceivable, not to say believable; but the Grampians were a far-off outlandish unimaginable region, Cameron, Maclean, Farquhar names unknown. Habitual talkers, talked about the landing at so-and-so, the mastering of the clans at so-and-so, the proclamation at so-and-so, mumbling a hopeless attempt at pronunciation, then talked about this and that and the next-come trifle; but there was no stir except of tongues. The English Jacobite did not feel that magnetic presence which had at last kindled the Celtic fervour; the English Hanoverian's fear was as yet a mere curiosity. In very truth what had so far touched the yokels of the forest the nearest and excited them most was the proclamation warning unauthorized persons against bearing fire-arms. The king returned to England without haste, and at the September sheep fair at Papplewick the price of sheep and lambs was quite steady.

By the beginning of October the occupation of Edinburgh, the defeat of Preston-Pans had passed from mouth to mouth; first as shifting rumours, quicksand to the most cautious tread, then with something like the firmness of reality, being based upon expresses from the north subscribed for by the corporation and inhabitants of Nottingham and published from time to time in the local newspaper. Of which however few got sight,

and of those few only a rare one or two could read. The hasty levy of a regiment of light horse by the county was a matter of vastly nearer importance. But even therein it was its being namesake to the Duke of Kingston, it was the colour of a uniform, the clatter of a sword, the paces of a charger, that drew attention, rather than the bloody service for which those red-cheeked squires' and farmers' sons were being enrolled.

Every night Fortuna sang "Young Jemmy," the ballad of Lord Derwentwater and other Jacobite songs, and talked of her uncle Charles and others who had their feet in the stirrups in 1715; sang and talked, and shrank from measuring its effect upon her son. Every night she and he let their conversation drift towards Scotland. They pieced reports together, enlarged upon rumours, surmised probabilities, a thin warp crossed by the sarcastic comment of Press, who opined that King Georgie would be too old for Prince Charlie. Nothing practical was ever said either by mother to son or by son to mother. Only Fortuna, going by chance to her son's room, saw that his sword had been recently polished to the last degree of resplendency. Thenceforth her eyes followed him with a wistful expectancy which she did not succeed in keeping secret from him. He, restless, dissatisfied, uneasy, undecided, went to and fro in the forest and its purlieus, taking no pleasure therein.

## CHAPTER VII

### A POPISH RECUSANT CONVICT

IN the first week of October Roland, whose thoughts were constantly on Scotland but without the urgency of a resolve, had been to look at a mare belonging to the farmer of Oxton Grange, but could not agree with him upon the price. It was a day of a lowering sky with a noisy bullying blustering gale of wind, such as by confusing the eye and troubling the ear helps one to go astray. By sunset he had got so far on his indirect return by Bawford steps as to be crossing the Rufford road within a short distance of Sansom Wood, a collection of decaying timber, mostly oak, along the brow of the next rise, when he found that he had walked into the midst of a scattered party of some half-hundred red-coated horse-soldiers with the Hanoverian black cockade on their hats. They were looking up and down the road, which however was a mere sandy track across a heath, as if in some uncertainty; and the two nearest, officers by their dress, were in earnest discussion together. The younger was saying:

"We have certainly lost our way."

"It iss zo," answered the other with an accent markedly foreign.

Just then they caught sight of Roland, and the latter speaker called to him:

"Holla, yoonker! Von vort. Vere are ve? Vot iss ze roat to Mansfelt? Shpeak!"

Roland was irritated by the sound of the foreigner's voice, suspecting him to be of the same race as the hated Georgian kings. He walked across the road without answering, looking neither to the right nor left.

The English-speaking officer threatening him with his half-pike called after him, "Why don't you answer? Stand, sirrah! In the king's name!" with ever increasing peremptoriness.

Still Roland neither turned nor spoke, but began to thread his way at the quickest of walks among the furze and ling on the other side of the road.

"Stop him! Bring him to me!"

At their officer's command horsemen trotted after him. He started running at such speed as he might along ground so encumbered. Seeing they did not gain on him two of his pursuers unslung their carbines and fired, and a bullet from one or the other grazed his left arm. But others had happened on a trodden track and were already heading him. He stood and let himself be taken. The corporal in command cursed him freely for the trouble he had given, first in running away and then in not getting killed offhand. He bade two men alight and pinion him with a halter, by which one of them led him back with many a jerk and much unnecessary roughness. Again the officer questioned him; but he had been heated by the chase, felt the sting of the wound and the trickle of the blood, resented the halter and his rude treatment, so that his natural stubbornness was increased to obstinacy. He said not a word until he was asked if he was deaf and dumb; which he answered with a curt "Neither."

"Vy gif you den no antvort?" said the foreigner. "Know you not?"

"I don't choose to know."

The foreigner slapped him across the jaw with a heavy gauntleted hand.

"You Hanover rat and coward!"

"Haha! You be zare, not true?"

"Now we know what hole you're in," said the other officer, "I'll warrant we shall soon smoke you out. Belt him well, Thorp."

One of the soldiers unbuckled his belt, with which he dealt their captive a round score of blows over the shoul-

ders. The metal fittings seemed always to find a weak place where there was prominence of bone or deficiency of padding, but his pride hardened him to bear it without wincing.

"Now are you prepared to speak?" said the officer.

"What do you think yourself?" answered Roland.

"I think——"

The officer began fiercely with his eyes on the lad's handsome resolute face, but abruptly checked his tongue and looked up at the lowering sky, around on the darkening earth.

"By Gott, venn vè in mine faterlant vere," said the alien, "ve vould him zat fairy zoon ouss—ouss—ouss—croosh."

"May be, sir," said the English officer, "but our men and even our boys are not soon crushed. So I think—the night is fast coming on, and we have wasted too much time over him already—we will return upon our track and leave him to be dealt with by the Mansfield magistrates."

"Beg pardon, sir," said one of the men who had overtaken Roland and now stood at the salute.

"Well, Matthews?"

"I saw a track, sir, by vonder wood, which seemed to lead back to the way we left but further up."

"We might do worse than try it."

The officer gave the command, the trumpet sounded the rally, the stragglers hastened up and ranked themselves.

"Woulds, bring your prisoner on."

They rode a little way up the road.

"This, Matthews?"

"Yes, sir."

The officers rode to the front; the troops followed briskly; but Roland hung back, and his conductor not having had the wit, unbidden, to secure the rope-end to the saddle they lagged from the first in spite of frequent jags and jerks, threats and curses. Now Trooper Woulds for his surly temper was the most unpopular

man in the squadron, and when he invited his comrades to help his pace by basting his prisoner from behind, they only laughed and mocked his distress.

"What's these 'ere two summats," said one, "tied together with a bit o' cord?"

"Is one of 'em a man?" said another.

"Then which of 'em's the beast?" said a third.

"This un for sure; it's last."

"Nay, this un; it's first."

"Donkey goes last."

"Pig goes first."

"Drop your cursed tomfoolery," said Woulds, "and prod him in the ribs with your skewer."

"Can't; I'm a-keeping it clean against the next royal review. By order."

"Be damned to both of you. Here, Hassall! Come on and bang the young devil in the back. You may knock his brains out for aught I care."

"Nay," said Hassall, "you must be battledore to your own shittlecock; it's your game."

Soon there was but one man in their rear, and to him Woulds appealed as he rode up.

"Give the young hound—rot him!—a good kick atween his shoulders, Sills, and waken him up."

Sills lunged out as he trotted by but without zeal, and Roland springing aside easily baulked him of his aim. He did not turn back to better the attempt, but with the habitual oath regained his stirrup and rode on. Woulds halted and tried to strike his prisoner with the flat of his sword, but Roland putting forth his strength managed to keep the rope taut and himself out of reach. This delay only increased the interval between the laggards and the main body, which in a few minutes when Sansom Wood was reached was quite a score of yards ahead; and the wind among the trees out-roared every other sound.

As they skirted the wood they came on a tall straight beech sapling outstanding irregularly in their path. Roland at the selfsame moment was aware of the tree and also that he was preparing to pass on one side of it, his

conductor on the other. The opportunity was like match to dry priming, like concussion of hammer on flint, or to be quite modern enough on cap. At a sudden prompting of instinct, a mere animal act without ranking of conditions or fear of consequences, Roland immediately swung himself round the tree. The check pulled the rope tight and hurling him violently against the trunk banged all the breath from under his ribs. The rider was dragged to the ground and lay half stunned; the startled horse galloped off. The other troopers drew rein, but before they could return to their comrade's help, before they exactly knew the shape of his mishap, Roland had partly recovered breath, had pulled away the other end of the rope which was twisted round the fallen warrior's arm and had slipped into the wood. Under the trees it was already so dusk, the ground too was so overgrown with brushwood and the roar of the wind was so all-pervading, that pursuit was impossible; he was lost to sight and hearing at once. The nearest troopers fired a few shots and barked a few trees, then had to be content with catching Woulds' charger and helping him to remount; which they did not without the encouragement of many a jibe, both humorous and malicious.

Roland, the better to escape a second encounter with his captors and to avoid the notice of others, kept on the Blidworth side of Long Dale, traversed Blidworth common, a mere wilderness of gorse and heather, and taking his time came out an hour later beyond the fish-pool. He crossed the Mansfield road and went by Hagg wood, from whose depths came the shrill billowing of a riggish hart. There he met a Blidworth labourer whom he knew well enough by sight, named Hotchkiss. They passed one another with a bare good-night. But after they had passed, Roland whose senses were on the alert heard Hotchkiss stop and turn; heard him after a deliberative interval call out:

"I say, young man!"

Roland turned and answered:

"Well?"

"How long has it took yer to grow that theer gret big long tail?"

"Not so long as you'd think."

Roland was already on the move, but was again stopped.

"Stay! How long do I think?"

"I don't know."

"Can't say but what I've gotten some truth out on yer. Thankee and good-night."

"Good-night. Stop! One word more."

"Two if yer like. I were nivver to a word; nor more nor to a pint."

Roland had bethought himself that he might meet another inquisitive person, whom it would not be so easy to put off.

"You might just cut it off for me."

Hotchkiss walked slowly up with a funny side-roll, which at each step brought him perpendicularly over the foot that bore the weight. He handled the halter like an expert.

"Ah, but yer didn't grow this yersen I doubt?"

"I never said I did."

"How coomed yer by't then?"

"Some men tied it on."

"Then for sartain it'll untie that sattles it; there's no need to cut it. Why did they do't?"

"Because I wouldn't answer 'em?"

"Why wouldn't yer answer 'em?"

Hotchkiss was untying the knot as deliberately as he was doling out his interrogatories. Roland chafed but replied:

"Because I did not like their looks."

"What the devil had their looks to do wi' yo? Unless m'appen yo made 'em an' they spoilt 'em for yer? No?"

Roland was still tied.

"I didn't like their questions either."

"Yo might a hanswered accordinglye. There's two answers to iv'ry question unner the sun, a fool's an' a wise man's. 'Owiver I wain't say but what yo've done



raight by yersen; yo've gotten this bit o' wunnerful good stuff. Yo see, there's two roads o' lookin' at iv'rything; save two or three drabbited one-sided things like co'd an' hunger. Well, here 'tis. I nivver handled a better lenth o' rope i' my life."

He held the halter loose in his hand.

"Thank you, I don't want it. Throw it away or keep it as you like."

"Nay, it ud be a mighty wrong haction to holl it away. A thief might find it an' steal a hoss for to put it on; a fool might find it an' waste hafe a working day looking for th' owner; a crack-pot might find it an' hang hissen wee't; Job Townsend might find it an' swear as he'd wove it hissen. I'll keep it mysen just for to keep other folk out o' mischief."

Now when Hotchkiss on his way home turned into the "Will Scarlett" at Blidworth for his usual pot of ale, he laid the halter on the bench beside him while he slowly sipped. The next customer to enter sat down on the other side of the halter, Charles Neighbour the pinder; whose curiosity was a very itch.

"This yourn?" asked he.

"Ay," answered Hotchkiss.

"It's non home-made."

"Not it."

"Bought it at Mansfield market?"

"No."

"Nottingham Goose Fair?"

"No."

"Wheer then?"

"Nowheer."

"Then 'ow did yer coom by't?"

"Honest. But whether e'erybody who's handled it can say the same——"

"Ay, ay? I'm beginning to——"

"Then yo've nubbut to keep on as yo've begun. But my mug's out; I moot be jogging home to my missis."

Hotchkiss rose and picked up the rope.

"Stop an' hae another wi' me."

"Thankee, I don't mind if I do."

"Yo say as there's been dishonesty somewheer i' th' handling on't."

"Not I. This good rope can't tell me noat, an' if it could I shouldn't ax. I mean to keep a clean conscience."

"Who had the handling on 't next afore yo?"

"Now that's a question as can be hanswered wi'out ayther maybe or downraight lig.<sup>1</sup> I've been waiting for't."

Then with no more than the normal indirectness Hotchkiss drank his second pot and told his story, by sips. His story, once a-wing, flew and flew until it came to the ears of Lord Byron, who inquired into the meaning of it with an angry zeal. He soon learnt from Mr. Lindley of Skegby that complaint had been made to him at the "White Hart" inn, Mansfield, by Lieutenant Hemsley of Wade's horse concerning a young countryman's refusal to answer lawful inquiries in His Majesty's name, his arrest thereupon and escape. He perceived that this tallied with the current rumour about Roland Surety. He stirred up his fellow-magistrate, and the two put their heads together. The rope was sent for, but being asked answered nothing, as Hotchkiss had foretold. An express was despatched after the lieutenant, but owing to his frequent removals was some days in finding him, and then on the eve of his commanding officer's advance towards Scotland he could or would not be spared from his military duties. In his absence it was impossible to verify the suspicions against Roland; the magistrates had to be content with summoning him as a person suspected of disaffection to appear before them at Newstead, to take the oaths to His Majesty and to sign the declaration against popery.

Roland duly appeared as cited and admitted that he was over the age of eighteen; but on hearing the purport of the oaths required of him, bluntly refused to swear without any equivocation, mental evasion or secret reservation whatsoever that he did sincerely promise to

<sup>1</sup> Lie.

bear true allegiance to his Majesty King George; did from his heart abhor, detest and abjure that damnable doctrine or position, that princes excommunicated by the Pope may be deposed or murdered by their subjects; refused to swear that he did sincerely acknowledge our Sovereign Lord King George to be lawful and rightful king of this realm, and would not solemnly and sincerely declare that the person pretending to be King of England by the name of James the Third had not any right or title whatsoever to the crown of this realm. Mr. Lindley, taking a humaner view of his duties, would have persuaded the boy by detailing the disabilities which his obstinacy would bring upon him; that he would be debarred from keeping arms or a horse above the value of five pounds, from travelling more than five miles from home without a license, from bringing an action at law or suit in equity, and so forth. Roland however stood firm, and after a furious browbeating by his lordship he was let go for the time, with the warning that his refusal would be certified to the next general quarter sessions to be holden the week following at the Shire Hall, Nottingham; whereat he was cited to appear.

On the first day of the following week he met Jack Gaskin the parish swineherd of Papplewick near the Ravenshead Oak, an ancient lightning-blasted stump, whereby Jack's charge was feeding on the acorns and mast shed by a few scattered trees, and the two men drew together for a little casual talk. Only a little way off was the sandy track of the Nottingham and Mansfield road, which ran in view for half a mile, then dipped and was lost among a succession of undulations that rose ever higher towards Mapperley and the county town. As they talked two stags came into sight over the brow of a hill a mile away beyond Long Dale on the other side of the road, one backing, the other hustling, acorn-fat, amorous, with coats that shone in the sun. They were at the ceremonious preliminaries of a fight. Now threatening, now giving ground, feinting, dodging, finessing, they had not yet come to close quarters and no hurt had

been done to their glossy hides by their dagger-like brow-points, when suddenly they lifted their hostile heads into the attitude of listening. Apparently they got no satisfaction out of their listening, for in a few moments they bounded away over the nearest ridge and out of sight.

Soon to the duller ears of the men there came a faint sound which made them question each other. Their questioning got them no profit, but by waiting they found that the sound gradually increased from faint to loud, and then became loosely recognizable as a confused tramping, jingling, clattering, clashing, rumbling which came up-wind from the south. They turned their looks to meet it, and presently on the road below appeared from Nottinghamwards a handful of horsemen in glittering skull-caps and breastplates and with swords drawn. But that considerable noise evidently did not all come from so small a company; Roland and Gaskin continued looking to its rear. Soon there came into sight a much larger body of cavalry similarly equipped but with their swords sheathed; then two companies of infantry in red coats, white breeches, white gaiters and cocked hats. These were followed by a larger number in blue coats with red facings, escorting nearly a score of cannon and a long train of artillery carriages and baggage waggons. Swords clanked, bridles jingled, iron hoofs struck the stones of the road. Every detail of the uniforms stood out in the noontide sun, the red, the blue and the white, the yellow facings, the parti-coloured lace on the hats. Every bit of steel flashed as it seemed to Roland with a hostile intention.

"It moot be them sojers o' Gen'ral Wade's," said the swineherd. "They were talkin' about noat else at th' ale-hus. They lay at Nottingham for the night. They're a-goo'in' to faight some wild cannibal Pope's men a long way off. Furder nor York they say. I reckon they'll mek minshmeat on 'em, once they've let on 'em."

Roland guessed their errand as well or better than the swineherd, but he stood and looked on and said nothing. He felt as though a pageant of the war between legitim-

acy and usurpation, between truth and heresy, were being acted before his eyes; while he stood by locking on with a harmless bit of ashwood in his idle hand. Now and again was heard, sharp and imperative, the word of command. He imagined himself one of a gallant little band of patriots swooping down upon that vainglorious array of hirelings and scattering it; imagined and at the same time scorned himself for standing there inactive. Meanwhile the last of the wagons rumbled by, the last of the infantry passed and a squadron of horse brought up the rear.

"I should think mysen a numskull," said Gaskin, "if I were very fierce to faight again all them swerders an' pistols an' musketers an' cannoners. What d' yo say?"

"I should be fain o' the chance," said Roland.

"Yo don't say so? Well, to huz labourin' men a dab o' sense is worth a dollup o' daring. But I reckon yo're summat betwix' an' between, as they say; nayther, somebody nor nobody, nayther fat nor lean."

Roland did not obey the summons to the quarter sessions, and was at once adjudged a Popish recusant convict, and as such forfeit and to be proceeded against. Being required so peremptorily to make his choice between the rival kings, he did so in favour of King James, and made his hasty preparations for flight to Scotland. On the first day of the quarter sessions he hurriedly closed with the Oxton farmer for the mare. Fortuna, who probably had an exaggerated notion of the penalties for recusancy, withdrew her silent but not secret opposition and herself urged him on. She affected to accept with satisfaction Press's proposal that Bridget the maid's brother Jude, who was of about the same age as the young master, should sleep in the house during his absence.

Next morning by daybreak the mare was in the shed which served Roland for stable, ready saddled, with a pair of silver-mounted pistols in the holsters—one of them had missed fire at Preston—and he himself was in

the parlour booted and spurred, hatted and cloaked, and under his cloak the reverend father's sword. He only awaited his mother's appearance and farewell blessing, with less than a dutiful patience, it must be admitted. She was on her knees up-stairs praying and making vows with unwonted fervour for her son's safety. He heard a confused noise of feet and voices at the rear of the house, went forth by the back door, and found the yard and adjacent premises in the occupation of the parish officers, Master Henry Huff, farmer and churchwarden, Samson Smallage, shoemaker and constable. Huff sat his stodgy old piebald mare, wore a broad-brimmed hat, huge jack-boots and long coat with a broad leathern belt buckled round the waist. Smallage was before him on foot; he had twisted up his dirty apron into a girdle for his loose jacket. By him stood Thomas Eato, the bound-bailiff, and Thumb, a labourer, each armed with a staff. Press faced them on the doorstep, irate and eloquent.

"Here's Master Churchwarden," she said, "and Master Petty Constable, and Masters Pettier Constables if there be such a thing; and none the less the whole gang of 'em are a set of errant thieves."

Just then Philip Kippis, wheelwright's journeyman, led Roland's mare out of the stable.

"What are you doing here?" said Roland. \*

"Robbery and battery and murder and all that's dirty," answered Press; "that they're doing. Han't they the proper faces for it? 'Twouldn't be honest to have such visomies and not be scurvy knaves. From this day forth Harrison's our shoemaker."

"Cobbler yo mean," said the constable. "Well, he knows summat, does Harrison; he knows how to charge. Be that as it may, ma'am, I've a justices' warrant for what I'm a-doing"; whereupon Roland could see that he had a bit of blue paper in his hand; "and it wain't be no she-cat's yarling as'll hinder me."

"Cat? Call me a cat?" cried Press. "It ud be setting some folk a whole heaven too high to call 'em dogs."

With that she advanced on the constable in battle array, a movement dexterously foiled by his timely retreat behind the greater bulk of the churchwarden and his mare. Huff, naturally the most unassuming, plain-spoken of men, had for his year of office put on a loud pomposity of ill-remembered scraps.

"I call on you, Roland Surety," he cried, "likewise you, Miss Thingumbob, to beware o' doing me vi'lence in the discharge of my lawful legal duty. And I hereby give notice that having been judged a popery cussing convick—that's only Roly—at the general quarter sessions holden at Nottingham yisterday, you're thereby bro't under the pennities and disabilties of the status King William Thud."

"Who calls our Mr. Roland a cursing convick?" said Press. "If it's yourself I'll say, 'tisin't even a small matter, but if 'twas King William he ought to be ashamed of hisself in his fine marble tomb."

"Hold your peace, Press," said Roland peremptorily, "and let me speak. What does it all mean?"

"It means," said the churchwarden, "that you're not to keep no hoss above five pound vally; to give up to uz hereby present all arms and weapons and guns and things whatsumdever i' your possession, and not to travel above five mile from home without a lawful licin swore afore two magistrates."

"For which puppose," said the constable, coming forward as Press retired, "I purduces my sairch warrant. Purcede to mek entry, Thomas Eato."

The bailiff made for the house, but Press slipped in before him and would have shut the door, had he not thrust a big foot between it and the jamb.

"Push him away, Mr. Roland, do!" she cried. "I can't be outside as well as in."

But before Roland could either do or forbear, the bailiff had shoved his broad shoulders in after his shoe, thus forcing Press back from the door. The churchwarden dismounted; he and his comrades followed Thumb into the house, all but the man who held the

mare. Seeing Kippis left unsupported Roland took a guinea from his purse, drew his sword and stepped up to him, saying :

"Will you take this and let her go quietly, or——"

Kippis was of no heroic mould ; he inquired not concerning the alternative but took the coin and gave the reins.

"But knock me down," he said, "so's I may hae summat to colour my bare word wee."

Roland doubled his fist and drew back his arm. The wright's man blenched.

"Nay, nay ! just a weeny tap'll do as well as a dazzer. I'm no White o' Laxton."

It was too late however to stay the blow, which fell lustily and gave his back if not his word the colour of the ground. Roland jumped into the saddle and rode off. But before he was fifty yards gone on the way to Scotland, he heard Press's shrill voice flying after him wind-borne from the kitchen doorstep.

"Mr. Roland, Mr. Roland ! They're misusing madam !"

He stayed his horse on the instant. That near-by concern did away for the time with the three-hundred-mile-off Scottish enthusiasm. He galloped back, leapt down, pushed by Press without heeding her explanations, accusations, amplifications, and taking the advice of his ears made straight for the parlour. Through a ring of men he saw his mother's face and nothing more ; pale, perhaps with fear, but quite self-possessed. He drew his sword again, and bursting in swished it round and round like the sails of Master Cowley's big windmill, so clearing an horrific space between the lady and intrusion ; while the parrot ruffled her feathers and flapped her wings and screamed, "Hanover rat, rat, ware o' the cat, cat !" But though Smallage flinched and Eato and Thumb drew back, the churchwarden held forth his staff and kept his ground.

"Begone with you all !" cried Roland. "Out, you rascality !"



"I wain't begone," said Huff; "I wain't out. I'm no rascality. I stand for the king and the parish o' Kirkby in Ashfield; and so I reckon as this here lawful staff's as good or better than your outdacious unlawful sword, Master Roly Surety."

Roland might look fierce, might swell his chest and speak big, he knew he could not do more than brandish his sword at a harmless distance from his neighbours. That common fellow in homespun with the bit of stick in his hand had the better of him. Besides his mother had begun to hang on his sword arm and cry:

"Put it up, Roland dear! put it up, child! It affrights me. You will be hurting somebody. Ah! then it went quite near our shoemaker. I am not a whit afraid except of you and the sword."

So Roland had to put it up. Whereupon the constable, coming forward, again demanded the weapon in the king's name.

"Do you mean king or elector?" asked Roland loftily.

"King J— a— a— meś," squealed the parrot.

"Sure the devil's i' th' bird!" said Smallage. "Nay, but I mean King George, God bless him."

"Amen," said the bum-bailiff.

"I do not acknowledge any such person."

"Then he mun mek shift to live wi'out your knowledge. Any'ow this is his 'fishal staff an' we're his 'fishal men, so I'll vouchsafe to ax yer for that theer sword, young man."

Since Roland evidently could not use his sword to defend his sword, he had to yield it up indignantly to those grimy paws, belt, silver-decked scabbard and all. Then with a full heart he kissed his mother's hand and rushed from the room, partly at least that nobody might see the ripe tears fall from his eyes. Kippis had caught the mare and again held her by the bridle. Roland ran up to him and demanded restitution.

"Wheer's yer sword?" said Kippis.

"I've given it up. But——"

"Then I reckon yo mun gie the hoss up an' all."

"I've my fist if I han't my sword."

"That's a slow death; but a swerd, by Gum, it's flish 'ere, flash theer, then swish through the prime o' your guts, and yo've no appetite for your next dinner."

There was a scuffle, of which Roland may have had the better; but in the midst of it the mare felt her head free, flung up her heels and galloped off to her well-known comfortable lodgings at Oxtou Grange, eight miles distant. Kippis was again on his back.

"She's skeltered," said he. "Hae yer done?"

"Yes," said Roland.

"Then I'll get up. But I'm non so hoggish about faighting as to ax for a hammering about noat."

The wright's journeyman got up and wiped his bleeding nose on his sleeve, while Roland returned to the house. At the door he met the constable and his party coming forth. They had ransacked the house, seized not only his sword but an old hunting-knife that had been his mother's grandsire's, and bore them away pursued by Press's unwearied vituperation.

"Stop!" she cried. "You're forgot something. You'll all be murdered in your beds yet. Look!"

They were safe through the yard but turned back to the gate to look, constrained by curiosity or other fatality. She held forth a silver-mounted case which her mistress sometimes wore dangling from a stay-hook. She opened it and exhibited one by one a pair of scissors, a puny pocket-knife, a bodkin, a thimble.

"Here, take it; if you durst. 'Tis madam's equipage, the only thing left as we could hurt even such fleas as you with."

They repented of their return, but stood awhile as if spellbound to listen.

"What? Is't so fearsome a thing that you durstn't handle it? Nor yet touch it? Nor even look at it? Here! I've put 'em back in the case for ye. You'll be padded against misfortune. You'll neither see, touch, taste nor smell it. Where's your spirits, carcasses?"

And so forth. During which they managed to turn

tail and push back through the gate. When they were fairly out of hearing Samson Smallage drew a breath and said :

"Whew ! What a sperrited wife that'n ud mek !"

"For som'dy else ?" said Kippis.

"Ay."

"I'm wi' yer."

"Me an' all," said Thumb.

"There's a woman like yon," said Kippis, "i' my wife's fam'ly. Her finger nails are her ten commandments, an' she wouldn't gie a hinch o' room, no, not to th' squire or God A'mighty."

"In her own house, Philip," said Huff severely.

"Ay, of coorse. In other folk's housen she can behave hersen. And at church an' all."

Meanwhile Roland had gone in again to his mother, had fallen on his knees at her feet and said :

"I've made a vow, mother; and I'll keep it to the death."

Fortuna started. It sounded to her like the very voice uttering almost the very words which had undone her.

"La, child, say no more," she answered with well put on levity. "Be your silence your—your surety. Sure I grow a witling in my extreme old age."

Thus lightly did she cover the exceeding narrowness of her escape from saying "bond," word still more suggestive and two-edged.

On the same day Lord Byron went up to London for the meeting of Parliament, having strongly recommended the Reverend Mr. Eustick of Kirkby to keep a sharp eye upon the purley-woman's son. But the next time Roland met the young squire of Annesley he was greeted by him with unusual cordiality, which set him wondering for five seconds what it meant.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THREE THORN HOLLOW

THAT legal violence and robbery gave Roland's inclinations the urgent sting which they had hitherto lacked. He did not reason it out as an oldster might have done, he merely felt; felt that in fighting for the Stuart he was also fighting for liberty civil and religious; a strange conjunction, but there have been stranger in history. Thenceforth it was his ardent desire to be gone to the seat of war, not mainly to escape a disagreeable situation but to put his principles into his right arm and weight a blow with them. It did not escape him that his mother, now that he had for the present got off with the seizure of his arms, was again reluctant, in womanish timidity as well as motherly tenderness, to let him go. He had agreed within himself not to set off without more than her consent, her good-will, but trusted that when every hindrance to his departure but the last was removed her own voluntary hand would remove it. He went on with his preparations, as little within her observation as possible. His chief material obstacle, and that a great one, lay in the difficulty of secretly procuring another mount. The Oxton farmer had repudiated their bargain, kept the mare, given the pistols up to the authorities and returned the money. Fit horses were scarce, so many having been taken up by the king's hastily recruited armies and the levy of the local regiment. Moreover by a persecuting statute the recusant was confined to a circle within which he was well known and his every movement watched. One important preparation however he could and did make; he went to Nottingham and bought a wig,

his first. But not before he had procured a license to travel signed by two justices of the peace, having taken his corporal oath before one of them that he had truly acquainted them with his business and desired the said license for no other end or purpose.

At the end of the same week, the third in October, the troops which had encamped so long on the Wheatley hills moved northwards, then 11,000 strong, under Field-Marshal Wade. For a few days Nottinghamshire folk looked that way with great faith in the general's great age, expecting something decisive; but nothing happening, presently forgot him, his army and their expectations. There was a lull in the war news. It almost seemed as if Charles Edward, content with the recovery of his ancestral domains, was willing to leave England to his Hanoverian rival. Tom Warmly, toper, politician and whittaw, offered in the kitchen of the "Admiral Anson" to bet his best cart-pad against a pinch of Joe's Kipping's snuff, that such a division had been agreed upon by King and Pretender over a friendly bowl of punch; and Joe Kipping, notorious for his speculative rashness, had refused the venture. Nevertheless the levying, mustering and drilling of the Duke of Kingston's Horse went on. Jack Halfhide of Wandesley enlisted, and looked so well in the uniform that Jack Hopewell of Felley Abbey did the like, less it would appear from a military than a millinery enthusiasm. Meanwhile Roland, restless but decided, went to and fro in the forest and its purlieus, taking no pleasure therein.

Gunpowder Treason and King William's landing were conjointly honoured as usual with divine service, mobbing of the Methodists, squibs, sky-rockets, bonfires and drunkenness. On the following day William Chaworth met Fortuna on the road as he returned in the evening from fox-hunting. He dismounted and saluted her respectfully. It was two years since he had done more than exchange a passing greeting with her, and during the interval he had advanced much in susceptibility to feminine grace. He felt a timidity in addressing her

novel to one whose leaning was by no means towards diffidence.

"Madam," he said, "I have been wanting to speak to you of this long while—these three weeks."

"I am always at home to my friends, you know," answered Fortuna with a smile that neither showed nor covered the least reproach.

To which the young man could make no better return than a rustic "Thank ye, madam;" adding, "'Tis about your son."

"What of him?" said Fortuna, and came nearer.

"In three months as from last quarter sessions he can be forbid the country unless he'll take the oaths."

"He never will," said Fortuna, a thought paler than before.

"Four magistrates can do it; and as soon as Lord—I mean I know one of 'em—some of 'em, who are mightily bent on doing it, for reasons of their own. 'Tis beastly of 'em. And so I told 'em."

Fortuna was yet paler; with a fear doubtless, but perhaps also with a resolve. Which would account for the wrinkle that furrowed her brow, perpendicularly dividing it in two, like her desire which would never again be one.

"I thank you for your news though the matter of it is disagreeable. And 'twas kindly thought on by you to take our part. I trust that before the time is up the means to do mischief will be taken out of wicked hands."

"There's good hope on't, ma'am. Mamma and I are both true blue whatever Uncle Levinz may be. Lord Byron is a mug of course. Now, if you please, I must not stay longer or mamma will be in a fine taking. Oh Lord, she'll think sure I've broke my neck at last out a-hunting. I'll be bound, madam, you never have such odd notions."

Perhaps it was because the parting with her own son, long foreseen, had suddenly been accepted. Anyhow Fortuna weighted her answer with more seriousness than she was wont to commit to words, and yet it was a

seriousness that was wrapped up in a fancy and gilded with a smile.

"Sir, a son can have but one mother, and his affection for her is naturally just enough for one; but a mother who has an only son out of a possible many feels that she has put a vast deal into one perishable vessel. At your convenience I should be glad to have more of your company, but I may not pretend to be your mother's rival."

Byron had boasted to his cousin of his intention to invoke the utmost rigour of the law against the young recusant. Chaworth had put in a hesitating word or two of deprecation, which being scornfully received his altruistic courage was reinforced by a personal resentment. He expressed his condemnation more strongly, and soon words so violent passed between the hot-headed young men as to lead to an open quarrel.

Fortuna however learnt that later on and not from Chaworth; who at the hint that such was her pleasure at once took leave of her, promising and intending soon to call upon her. But next week not only did the war news become more serious but hind-hunting began; and that and the chase of fox and hare, the bull and badger-baiting, cock-matches and wrestling so took his attention up, that a month passed and remembrance and convenience had not once come to him together. It was on the 11th that hind-hunting began, and two days later three events happened of more or less importance to our story, and the first to happen was the last to be openly discussed.

First then, in most houses on that countryside the inmate earliest to go down in the morning found pushed under the door a "Declaration to the People of Great Britain" over the signature of a James who claimed to be King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland. Of the recipients those who could read and understand, by far the smaller number, hastily burnt it or hid it away, nervously suppressed discussion of it in their households, went to and fro with the

encumbrance of a secret clogging the common talk about daily necessities and futilities, each being ready to believe with a mingled pride and fear that he was the only one to receive the missive, and ignorant whether the mere innocent possession of such a document might not be stuff out of which law manufactures treason. Those who could not read buzzed over the unwonted appearance of printed paper in the house, looked at it sideways, upside-down, askew, and sometimes even in the proper reading position; but being able to make nothing of it anyhow nor even to imagine anything, lost interest in it, put it up on the chimney-shelf, let it lie on the table or drift on to the floor, according as they were methodical, negligent or sluttish. There were moreover families which contained some odd member, who in the springless vehicle of ABC could drive joltingly over common monosyllables while going round the larger and more significant words. These, led by the big print, made out a "King" and a "James" where one would have expected a "King" and a "George"; and it was this class with an ignorance so near discovery which alone exuberated in agreement and dispute.

About noon news came to the rector by express from Nottingham that the Stuart prince and his army had at last marched into England. An hour later it seemed to be known by everybody pervious to news for three miles round. At any rate Goody Cheatle, half crippled but a confirmed newsmonger, nearly wore her rheumatism out hobbling from house to house in a vain endeavour to give somebody the start of surprise.

Shortly before sunset the Gipsies Ethan, Zuba and Alfa again set up their tents in the Grives. Notice of their arrival was brought by Ethan, who took himself and his fiddle to the "Admiral Anson" that same evening. He was asked then and many a time later how he came to escape so soon through the meshes of military service, but never gave an answer so completely satisfactory as to cut off the need of a furthering imagination. Evidently he was not willing to acknowledge that soon



after his enlistment the unwonted restrictions, added to the agitations of fear, rage and jealousy, had brought on a series of epileptic seizures which got him his discharge.

In the kitchens and parlours of the inns and mug-houses of Kirkby men warmed their prudence that night with old October and lesser ales, until they let out one by one, two by two, finally with a general confession the receipt of the treasonous declaration; and as the night wore on the discussion of that, of the march into England and the Gipsies' return became so inextricably mixed that folk of ordinary discrimination never got them separated again. Old Gaffer Dimsdale, who lived into the next century, believed to the last that they were equal moves in the wide conspiracy against King Georgie's throne.

Roland took the declaration as a personal call to which he could not offer a deferred obedience. He immediately found it settled in his mind without any conscious ordering of reasons or summing of conclusions, that if he could not go to meet his prince on four legs he must on two, if not as a gentleman, then like a cadger, and that forthwith. He did not however speak to his mother at once; he preferred that she should find the paper by her plate when she came down about ten o'clock and sat to her tea-breakfast. He had gone out.

"Who put this here?" she said to Press.

"Mr. Roland, ma'am."

"Pretty fellow, ma'am," quoth the parrot.

There may have been a slight increase of Fortuna's ladylike pallor, but nobody who appraised her less closely than her chambermaid would have weighed it in. She did once or twice lift her cup to her mouth, but her only business with the plate of buttered toast was to feed the parrot. Presently she said:

"Is Mr. Roland's best ruffled shirt ready?"

"Yes, ma'am. But he hasn't spoke of needing it."

The addition was less direct in method than was usual with Press. Soon Fortuna rose from the table.

"Why, ma'am," protested the maid, "you han't hardly eat one morsel."

"I've eaten more than usual," answered her mistress.

"More for Polly," squealed the parrot.

Fortuna stood by the bird and fed her with the rest of the toast, then went to the window and made a show of being interested in that narrow half-circle of misty landscape. Her vision, the psychic perhaps even more than the physical, travelled easily enough down the short straight path to the garden gate, which Roland for once had left open. That open gate proved but a vain invitation to liberty. As soon as it was passed fog and doubt trammelled the outlook, obscuring even the near things, that first clump of dank gorse and what she would do on leaving the window, wrapping the middle distance in a sombre mystery, and blotting out the natural horizons both of the landscape and of hope. When she turned away she sat at the table with her back to the fallacious window, drew towards her the only book within reach—she never knew what—entered on it at the end of the thirty-first chapter, went back to the middle of the fifth, pushed it from her, did a few uncounted stitches of her tent-stitching, then walked to her harp and without sitting to it idly turned her music over. Of which she saw but one title and that was the last, "The Ballad of Lord Derwentwater." Thereupon she went up to her own room.

Roland ever remembered the day's wanderings as part and parcel of all that winter's confusions. The sky and the air were of one grey, unpromising, unthreatening, blank; never once broken into clouds or stirred to motion. The light was such as gave nothing its living hue. The mist never quite succeeded in turning to rain, but his skin and clothes were wet, the trees dripped, the despondent clod was slimy with it. It hung before him and on either hand, a mere curtain of concealment. But he had youth on his side; nothing could shut off his prognostications of success, nothing could damp his spirit, quench the fires of his enthusiasm, take the colour from his hopes.

Only he feared meeting his mother; so the abortive day had merged in premature night before he returned.

Fortuna met his questioning glances quite directly and calmly. There was a pair of heavy silver spurs on the table. His looks went from her to them, and she answered as if they had been put into words:

"Your grandfather's; he wore them at Worcester. I brought them hither with me in case my baby were a boy."

He understood that her speech was but a fragment of her meaning; he went up to her and kissed her. She dissimulated her rising tears, made a wet smile of them and said:

"Now let us talk about getting you a horse, child. But first of all you must eat. And here comes Press with the wherewithal. Press, put those silver knick-knacks aside. Ah no; Mr. Roland, I see, will himself take charge of them."

While Roland ate they could talk about horses, and anything else that was not close to their hearts. He had been thinking it all over, and proposed that he should steal afoot to a fair or market, not too near, and there supply himself with a charger and what else was necessary. Fortuna willed to think hopefully of it and during the rest of the evening decision hovered on their tongues between Retford, Worksop and Chesterfield, she inclining to Chesterfield.

"'Tis near Ashover," she said, as though that were a reason.

There was no need, as it turned out, to decide on any one. When Roland went forth next day he met Ethan on the road not a furlong from the house, riding bare-backed just such a steed as he was wanting, a stout serviceable black gelding; and the sight of it made him forget to be surprised at the Gipsy's re-appearance. Ethan bade him a civil good-morning and seemed willing to stop and be questioned.

"That your horse?" asked Roland.

"Ay."

"Where are you taking him?"

"To the Mansfield Statute."<sup>1</sup>

"You'll be late."

"It's never too late for a bit o' prime stuff. Besides there'll be two pretty gentlemen there what are bidding each again t'other for him."

"What price do you set on him?"

"What's that to you? You've been forbid keeping hosses, I'm telled."

"I might say, 'What's that to you?'"

"I should answer back, 'A mighty pretty dear little noat,' and that's the blessed truth. Well, good-morning to you, master."

But when the Gipsy seemed all for going he gave his slackened rein the check and added:

"I've been offered five and twenty guineas twice ower, but I wouldn't look at it sidewise."

"I'll give you thirty; if you'll keep him for me quietly 'against I fetch him."

"Ah, but mebbe your pretty hångman ud hae summat to say to me, and there's not one word of all his cursed gab that I like at all."

Then Roland bethought himself and said:

"How is it you've come back so soon?"

"As you've truly spoke, I shall be late for the fair as 'tis." Ethan dug his heels in the horse's flanks but did not let go the restraint of the curb. The horse reared and showed off his high mettle. "Shukar, shukar! D'ye think you've a tipsy Gaujo farm-engro on your back or a pretty teeny little Gaujy?"

The horse was quiet again in an instant.

"What are you waiting for?" said Roland.

"I knowed you'd be sorry as soon as you let me go. Hain't he a nice showing-off temper? He'll go like a whirlywind or a maiden's breath at your sweet pleasure. You wain't find a many like him among yond mumply poverty-like Scotchmen."

Said Roland, "How do you know—" but suddenly

<sup>1</sup> Statutes or hiring fair.

thinking better of it substituted an oblique offer for his direct question. "If I gave you thirty-two it ud be at least two more than you looked for."

"It's a bargain, my gentleman, an honest Gaujous bargain! But now hark to me; it might ill-convenient a poor person like me to have ye a-coming down to the tent and a-saying, 'Where's my hoss? I must jal all on a suddent to meet a sartain pretty purtending fighting gentleman'; so I'll tell ye what; if you'll set a place and a time I'll be there to the minute. You takes the hoss, I takes the money, nobody's the wiser, and so—proper good luck to both of us."

Perhaps it is not surprising that Roland had an exaggerated sense of the watch that was being put upon him. He thought it out; then said:

"Do you know Three Thorn Hollow?" The Gipsy hesitated, nodded. "Be there with the hoss to-morrow morning afore you can part sunlight from moonlight."

"I'll be there without fail."

They parted, Roland going back into the house to inform his mother and complete his preparations, especially to get his hair dexterously cut by Press and to try on his wig, a small close bob as was then the top of the mode. Ethan continued on the road to Mansfield. For he still would pay his visit to the statutes, partly out of delight in a spicy mixture of chaffering, knavery and revelry, partly in the knowledge that if he could sell his present mount for something more than thirty-two guineas and buy another for so much less than it was worth, Roland would not be in a position to exclaim at the substitution. But their conversation had been spied upon from a distance and its purport at least suspected. Abel Marrott strode out of the gorse on to the road in front of the Gipsy and stopped him.

"So yo've coomed back?" said he.

Said the Gipsy between a whine and a jest, "Some tells me I have an' some tells me I hain't, and I don't know which on 'em to believe, for everybody seems to be trying to deceive the poor dear simple Gipsyman."

"That een't like me, for I tell yer straight I'm sorry yo're here again; and if yo don't mend yer sinful ways yo'll be a sight sorrier nor me afore yo've done. I warn yer too again selling that theer hoss to Roly Surety yonner. He's bin made a Papish reckless convert on, which is a mighty diff'rent thing to a Methodiss convert, an' moan't keep non above the worth o' five pound."

"Thank ye," said the Gipsy between a whine and a sneer, "it's mighty kind of ye to help the poor Gipsy to get an honest living. But I telled him the hoss warn't on sale, for that he were sold a'ready to a rich gentleman for five and thirty guineas, and I'm a-gooing now to Mansfield to hand him ower and handle the gold."

"It ud be a gentleman richer nor what he was sensible as ud gie that much for 'im. Howiver he een't the first yo've diddled ower a hoss. When shall yer begin to bethink yoursen o' your latter end?"

"Latter end?" said the Gipsy, and his speech was wholly sneer. "Ah, that'll be my pretty little feet, for my mammy telled me as my dear precious little head was borned first."

"Nay, man, it's nayther your feet nor the shoes on 'em, but the summat as'll happen yer after yo're dead."

"That'll be a grave with a topping o' soft green grass on the sunny side o' some quiet churchyard out o' the drippings from the church. There'll be a guinea for the parson, a crown for the clerk and a burial feast for a hundred merry worms."

"Merry? I don't know for that; but I do know as there's a worrum that dieth not, and I doubt yo'll find that no laughing matter."

"That's a sap belike? an adder? I never handle 'em, for I don't pertend the gift what some has."

"Yo don't seem to tek me in. But mebbe yo can unnerstan' this: Yo've gotten into a lumber once meddlin' wi' the king's deer; if yo do't again it'll be a long journey ower-seas for yer. Just keep that i' mind."

The Gipsy's next speech was a singular blending of whine and menace.

"I was like to ha' forgot, but sin you ax me so kind I'll put it safe by in my dear precious memory and remember it all my days." Suddenly he discarded the whine for pure threat. "Ay, and do you keep i' mind the bloody end that's awaiting you. For once a Gaujo has telled a dukker as true as any Romany could."

As far as could be seen or heard he gave the horse under him no hint either by voice or touch; nevertheless the animal at that opportune moment broke into a gallop and gave the advantage of the last word to his rider.

Abel soon recovered his ordinary surly composure, but the vague suspicions which ran in his mind caused him to hang about the Nook for a while. So it happened that half-an-hour later he was met a little lower down on the road by a travelling carpenter with his leathern budget of tools on his back. The carpenter asked him if he knew where Three Thorn Hollow was.

"It's a hout-o'-th'-way place," said the keeper. "What do yo want wee't?"

"Noat; but a hossman on the road was axin' me the way to't. So I wunnered, nivver haein' heerd on't."

"What sort hossman?"

"A Gipsy-like youngman on a black. So I axed the next man as I seed. It's yon side Foulevil Brook, hafe-way atween Mansfield Wood and Rain'orth."

"If yer know why did yer ax me?"

"Oh, bein' just curious-like to know if yo knowed; that's all."

"Who telled yer?"

"The young purley-man as lives i' th' Nook 'ere."

"Ah, he knowed, did 'e?"

"Ay."

Which rags of information Marrott was set a-piecing together all day off and on in his sluggish way, making of them a botchery as ill-assorted as any patchwork-counterpane ever contrived by patient housewife out of unmatchable odds and ends, the only constant amid so

many shifty variables being a conviction that Roland and the Gipsy were banded together for some secret rascality. But though we were to accept his guesses in bulk, we should still be left to conjecture for ourselves what was the Gipsy's motive for pretending to an acquaintance with Three Thorn Hollow. Perhaps a childish jealousy of acknowledging to his rival even so trivial an ignorance.

After dusk the keeper intercepted Samson Smallage on his nightly way to the "Admiral Anson," and began a conversation with him in the road so interesting that he drew him into his house to hear the conclusion of it. There the bewildered constable presently found that he had left talking of Roland Surety, and had somehow got involved in a prayer-meeting three hours long conducted by Leg-it. After which he returned home sober but low-spirited, without anything in the state of his stomach to account for it. As soon as he had crossed his threshold, he threw his hat down on the floor in a way that made Mary his wife look up from the rushes she was peeling for candle-wicks.

"I'm a gret sinner, Mary," he exclaimed.

"Yo are," said his wife through one side of her mouth, the other being occupied by a short clay pipe; "if yo mean yo're drunk."

"I'm non drunk; I wish I wor."

"Wheer hae yer been?"

"To prayer-meetin' at Abel Marrott's; that's all."

Mary took the pipe out of her mouth.

"Just what I were thinkin'," she said. "Well, it's a mucky shame as a gret big chap like him should be allowed to goo loose frightenin' the little chaps about their souls. There were some peace when he were allus faightin' all the tother big uns." She dropped her rushes on the floor, put down her pipe on the hob, reached her hood from its nail on the wall. "I'm a-goo'in' to tell 'im as much, and more. There's no satisfaction in haein' a bad opinion of a neebour if 'e don't know on't. Cram your supper down an' lave your sins be while I coom



back. I know 'em a danged sight better nor yo, an' I'll manage 'em for yer."

Samson 'ate his supper to the last mouthful, habit serving him instead of appetite; but it was long before his wife returned, and the first words she said were:

"My sins are gret and not a few nayther."

"He's fun yo out too, hes 'e?"

"Ay. What a terrible hard hitter 'tis!"

"I doubt he'll be too much for's. What mun we do? It's for yo to say."

"Do yo pray for my sins an' I'll pray for yourn; mebbe it'll coom easier for uz a that 'ow."

"Well, do thou begin, Mary; that's four raightful place. An' I'll be ready to cap it wi' my Amen."

"Down on thy two knees then; that's the true beginnin' on't."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TRIST

SAMSON SMALLAGE went to bed late but could not sleep. His wife had ceased from spiritual wrestling and according to wont had fallen asleep as soon as head touched pillow. He, weighed down by cares of office and the responsibility of blowing out the candle, was always a minute longer in settling; and on that night he never got over that minute. So much was he troubled by a sense primarily of his own sinfulness and vicariously of Mary's, that the added torment of her snoring was more than he could bear. I will not say but that his unwonted sobriety may also have had something to do with it. Anyhow he could not sleep. Encouraged by the delusions of the dim moonlight he rose long before dawn and walked forth. After hesitation he took the road that led directly to the fields, only because he must otherwise have passed Leg-it's, and knew that he would be impelled to knock him up and beg the comfort of his presence, the succour of his prayers. There was nothing he longed for so much, but he feared lest in rousing the Methodist he should also disturb his next neighbour, Ted Crabb, most companionable of cronies but also the most outspoken libertine and free-thinker in the village. So he turned his back on his desire, and being soon clear of the houses walked through the open tillage fields. The sky was veiled by a uniform woolly cloudiness which was saturated with the rays of the unseen moon. The same influence thinly pervaded the still air with a something unreal or at least mysterious that was hardly light, but it did not touch the earth, which lay wrapped in unbroken obscurity; save that at the constable's feet and for a little

way onward the path ever appeared not quite so dark as the adjacent ground, and may therefore be supposed to have owed a little to the hidden luminary.

It must not be imagined that Samson Smallage saw all that, though he may obscurely have felt it; for it was a time of awakening, when even a rural constable might put on introspection. All the way he was pondering that new spiritual trouble which had befallen him, with some such alarm and offended surprise as if stomachic disorder had been paying for an overnight's surfeit. But when he came to the verge of the ploughland there a gate crossed the road. He had either to open or turn back, and the stoppage seemed to give a jerk to the fleshly part of him, set it going again in full activity. He could see as well as feel. The dusky landscape unrolled itself before him, unsubstantial, shapeless, indivisible; to an imaginative eye like an unpeopled dream which leaves behind no memories, only one overwhelming impression.

The constable saw at least the outspread dark, felt at least the lonesomeness. He was on the point of turning back to bed and the spiritual comfort of married vexations, when he caught a flash of light a mile away a little to his right on the ridge of the hill before him, just where the Nook should be; a flash, and presently a steady irradiation, as if from an unlighted window. He immediately recalled the suspicion concerning the young Papist and the Gipsy which Abel had imparted to him, but which for the time had been completely driven from his mind by new and strange emotions. Thereupon however it recovered at a rush its proper place in his memory, and the constable resumed official activity. He went straight and knocked up Master Huff, who as churchwarden had especially in his charge the parochial morals and religion.

He was not far out in putting Ethan and Roland together in his thoughts. It was a low whistle of the Gipsy's, a whistle and a pebble or two from his hand to the casement, which had awaked Roland; who struck a light as soon as he learnt who had summoned

him, then went down and opened the back door. He expressed surprise at seeing Ethan there and without the horse. The explanation was glib and amounted to this : that Alfa, whose horse it was, would like to see the colour of Gaujo gold before she sent it by him to the appointed place.

"Nay," answered Roland ; "not until I have shall you touch."

He had nothing on but shirt and breeches, and the morning air was raw, but the Gipsy did not choose to make that excuse for his tartness ; his retort took the tone of an offended surprise.

"You're afraid to trust her that much? I hain't measured her tongue ; I don't pertend to know what she'll say when she larns as you thinks her a mumply hoss-cheat."

"I didn't say so."

"Maybe it's me then what you're suspeckful on?"

"I can't stay talking. I shall keep my side of the promise ; it lies with you to do the rest—or not to do it."

Having proved that there was lawyerish blood in his veins Roland went in and shut the door. Said Ethan through his teeth and the keyhole :

"For a Gaujo you speaks wonderful true ; it does lay with me." Then compressing his passion to a thin hiss he added, "And, dabra, I make you pay for it."

He uplifted his right hand towards the shut door in the attitude and spirit of an imprecation and a vow, though without the formal words. It would seem that by Roland's refusal he had been disappointed of some personal advantage. But he did not dwell on that outward act, he turned away and wandered back towards the Grives. To which however he did not go down, but keeping the higher ground above it passed on as if for Kirkby. So it happened that after a while he met a party hastily crossing the waste. He turned back, and following them closely made out by degrees that it was Smallage and Kippis upon the constable's pony, the churchwarden on his piebald mare and the keeper striding along beside

him. They made straight for the Nook. He followed until they reached the cottage and stood debating whether to lie in wait or knock up the household. There was no light in any of the windows. He stole up to Samson's elbow, but was not seen until he said:

"What are you agate on so early, masters?"

"Who the devil are yo?" exclaimed the constable, trying to hide in bluster the start which that sudden appearance had given him.

"It's the Gipsy!" said Abel.

He made a grab at Ethan; who however easily dodged him, and then answered from the other side of the churchwarden's piebald:

"If it's me you wants I'm here; but if it's Roland Surety you're like to miss of him. Didn't you see him douse his glim as you comed up? He's been gone dis five minute."

"Jump up again, wheelwright," said Samson. "We shall nab him at Three Thorn Holler."

"You'll wait a long' while fust. The place is changed. Mehbe you've letted yoursens be blowed."

"Then wheer is't now?" asked Huff.

"I'll tell ye; I'm here to tell ye. But fust you must promise me faithful as the person what meets him there shan't come to no harm whatsumdever."

"Who the devil's that," said Samson, "if it's not your own sen?"

"No matter that. If I don't have your sworned promise I wain't split."

"Be't so," said Huff. "I swear to't hereby and theerby."

"But what d'ye swear by?"

"Oat legal and lawful."

"Swear by the devil then."

A common shudder took churchwarden, constable and Kippis.

Quoth Abel, "The Bible says we moan't swear at all."

"Nay, nay," said Samson; "the Bible's a good book I've heerd say, and that ud be clean again the law of

England, which says, 'Swear, swear,' iv'ry time ommost yer oppens yer mouth. But I wain't swear by the devil; nay, nay! so don't temp me to't. I'll swear by—Gosh. By Gosh I will. And I'll tek the sacrament atop of that next Sunday."

Ethan accepted Gosh and the sacrament as a joint validity.

"It's by the Eréwash i' front o' Langton Hall; just where the watter rests itself unner a row o' little elms afore it begins to speak again. He's walking on his own dear feet, so you can easy be there fust."

"Ay," said the constable, "but what's to hinder yo from running on and gieing 'em warning?"

"That's it," said Abel; "he's such a slippy customer. I tried to cop ho'd on 'im just now, and 'e twizzled through my fingers like a handful o' wynd."

"Tell me, my masters, what ud be the use peaching 'em if all I wanted was to get 'em off?"

"I doh't know," said Huff; "but what a man don't know is no law-coort proof o' noat!"

"Lock me up against you come back. You'll be sure o' me then; as sure as if I was one o' your women and you'd married me."

Disregarding the Gipsy sneer the Englishmen took the Gipsy counsel. They shut Ethan up in Roland's stable, and for want of a padlock secured the door by thrusting a wooden peg in between staple and hasp. Then they went down-hill straight for Langton Hall with such speed as they might, riding two to a horse, Marrott behind Huff and Kippis behind the constable. The keeper made opportunity to say to Samson on the way:

"I hope yer found peace last night, brother."

But Samson had already forgotten.

"Piece o' what?" quoth he. "I wish I'd gotten a good piece o' fat reesty bacon wi' the sward<sup>1</sup> on't an' a thick chunk o' bread. I wouldn't ax for no better piece."

"Nay, I mean the peace o' God which passeth all unnerstannin'."

"Coom, coom, be reasonable, man. We can't be

<sup>1</sup> Rind.

expected to listen to a Methody sarmon a-hossback; afore breakfast too."

"By Gum, no!" said Kippis. "'Twould gie a body the wynd."

Then Samson, putting his heels into his pony's flanks, put a convenient unlistening distance between himself and his monitor.

"Abel," said the churchwarden, "if yer scar our game away with your loud argy-bargying, I'll hae yer up for rioting and chance-medley."

"Mester," answered Abel, "I nubbut speak what the sperrit tells me."

"Can yer perduce the sperrit to mek that good? If not, yer must pay for't i' th' flesh."

"I'm ready for that an' all when I'm called on," said Abel.

Hastening down the Erewash valley they kept a quarter of a mile to the right of the stream, swerving to that extent from the direct way which Roland probably would take; and so they came to Langton Hall at the back. It is an old mansion halfway between Kirkby and Pinxton surrounded by a plantation of trees, through which it peeps out here and there at the gentle green slope which goes down to the brook. The four alighted there, fastened the horses to the fence and quietly made their way afoot to the water-side. They neither saw nor heard anything to make them pause. They crossed the stream, Abel jumping, the others wading, and then went into hiding behind a row of some half-dozen young elms which were ranged along the bank. A few minutes after they had thus disposed themselves Roland walked gently up. He stood waiting on the bank above the elms until he was joined by Alfa, who rode the horse.

"I didn't expect to see you," he said.

"Very like not," answered she; "but there's no time for gab."

She leapt down at once. Roland put a little linen bag into her hand.

"What's this?" said she.

"The money," said he.

"D'ye think I'm so poor I don't know the weight o' gold?"

Before he knew what she was doing he had the bag back in his hand.

"There are thirty-two guineas here truly told. D'ye think I'm a cheat?"

"Twenty you mean."

"I bargained for thirty-two."

"I said twenty."

"Is't your horse?"

"Ay; leas't 'tis my ventur."

Roland began to suspect why Ethan had been beforehand in claiming payment.

"Anyhow I promised thirty-two."

"I don't care; twenty's all I axed."

She refused the bag, which he would have returned to her.

"It's worth thirty-two to me, and I won't pay less."

"Twenty ull pay me well, and I won't take no more. May-be you think a Romany girl can't be so set on her own liking as a Gaujo lad? I'm right glad I took it into my head to come mysen. You're a-wasting the friendly dark. And why did you change the ground? Three Thorn Holler is far afore this for a quiet bit of hoss-coping."

"Something happened that made me suspicious on't."

"If you'd any suspicion about ye, you should have kept a nice large piece of it for this 'ere place; it's three mile nearer Kirkby than the tother, and—Hsh! Jump up! I heard——"

Roland again held out the bag. Her "no" was peremptory, even angry. It was also final, for at the same moment the liers-in-wait rushed up. A moment was lost by Alfa in putting foot to stirrup. Moreover her attention was on Samson running in on the near side, and was neglectful of Marrott, who was on the off and like indeed to have seized the bridle, had not Roland dashed at him under the horse's head. The



impact made the keeper stagger back downhill, but Roland was thrown violently into Samson's arms and the two fell together. Alfa had no difficulty in saving herself and her horse. Huff and Kippis came up just too late, and Roland had to bear the brunt of their joint disappointment.

"I should a hed her fair, hoss an' all," said Marrott to Roland, "if yo hedn't balked me."

"He balked me as much," said Samson; "ay, and more than as much."

"Yo'll have to answer to the law, young man," said Huff, "for hindering uz lawful officers of this parish in the discharge of uz lawful duties."

"I thought you wanted me," answered Roland.

"And m'appen," said Samson, "yo'd call layin' a man on his back helpin' him to what he wanted?"

"There is sich a thing, Samson," said Kippis, "as bein' helped down. I've tasted on't mysen. I doubt yo'll non makle a summons up out o' that."

"Who were that tother person?" said Huff.

"Twere a woman, warn't it?" said Samson.

"If it warn't that theer young Gipsy trolly," said Marrott, "I'm a bad guesser."

To these remarks, all pointed at Roland, he replied with but a cold recommendation.

"If I were you I would catch the person, then you would know for sure."

"And what are yo a-doin' here?" asked Huff.

"Walking out," said Roland.

"Do yo allus walk out," asked Samson, "i' top-boots and spurs?"

Roland found it convenient not to answer.

"Yo were meanin' to buy yon hoss," said the keeper, "an' ride away on him to faight again the king."

"How do you know?"

"Yo know yo were."

"You can hardly make a charge out of what I know."

So it seemed, and further questioning getting no more from him he was allowed for the time being to go his

own way. The son of at any rate a partly known person with a roof of her own and a banking account, though a lost customer for boots and shoes, he could not decently nor even safely be treated with the rough and ready summariness that was good enough for a common vagabond; neither was his new wig without its effect. So the constable and his party, bent on having some taking to show for their labour, hastened in a half-daylight back up the valley to the little Gipsy camp at the Grives. But the camp was raised, by all appearance had been raised at least as early as the night before. Thence they went on to the Nook, promising themselves, in compensation for their disappointment to test upon Ethan the force of a statute of the preceding year, whereby he might be whipped and imprisoned for the treble offence of being a vagrant, a minstrel and a Gipsy. But when they reached the stable they found hasp and staple still secured by the peg, but the Gipsy gone. As a matter of fact he had forced the door with an iron crowbar which stood in a corner of the shed, and being out had hammered the displaced staple in again with a stone. But when they had satisfied themselves that the household was still sleeping and Roland not yet returned, they found it quite easy to believe that he had escaped by sheer wizardry, his own or more probably his mother's. So at least went the buzz in the village that morning; and in truth by the time that the bleary-eyed sun was two hours old in the grey sky, an imaginative child was ready to aver that she had seen him through the skylight over her bed, flying across the night towards Sutton "like a gret big black hat-bat." Which presently a grown-up woman confirmed with her second-hand imagination, and nobody but Ted Crabb feigned difficulty in accepting it.

Samson returned that night to his usual place at the "Admiral Anson," but he had made no objection to his wife's going to the nightly Methodist prayer-meeting, nay, had shown a willingness to avail himself if it so might be of a vicarious salvation. Anyhow he said to

her as they parted on the doorstep to go the one to the right and the other to the left :

"Yo might mek it 'we,' Mary. It couldn't do no 'arm."

At the ale-house he was bantered on all sides for his double change of front.

"If I were Abel," said Tom Warmly the whittaw, "I'd leather yer well for giein' me so much trouble. After he's weshed yer clean for yo to goo an' mucky yersen again all ower like this!"

"'Twain't my doin' to goo to th' prayer-meetin'. I just fun mysen theer."

"Not so much of a find nayther," said Ted Crabb, looking into his empty measure.

Crabb in his general revolt against Kirkby drank gin since the duty was lowered.

Said All-fours, mole-catcher and poacher, "We shan't nivver feels no 'surance as you wain't do 't again."

"I'll hold yer five to one as 'e does afore Christmas," cried Joe Kipping, but found no takers.

"Nay, nay, Joe," said Samson remonstrating, "I on'y did it that once just as a bit of a 'speriment."

"That's what th' Hucknall gauger said when 'e hanged hissen wee's wife's garter," retorted Crabb.

"I don't see but why once in a way any man might do 't."

"A man, ay, Samson," said his crony. "But yo nubbut hafe did it."

"And I'll tell yer for why. I'm in a fishal position 'ere, an' it comed to me very clear all at once as it be-hoooves a king's man to be o' the king's religion."

"That's guzzlin', muggin', dicin' an' whorin'. A proper sort o' religion that'n!"

"If yo can't say no good by His Majesty don't say no bad, Ted Crabb."

"The best I can say's noat."

"Well, that's summat."

"A thin sort o' summat too."

"What sort o' summat moot a Gipsy be made on, d'

yer think, to be able to sperrit hissen away like that'n did? D'yer think 'twould stan' a ducking i' th' mill-pond?"

Thus with a dexterity of which he boasted later on into the ears of his Mary Samson drew the conversation away from a dangerous to a safely academical discussion, wherein Ted Crabb took the side of rational dissent and everybody else that of orthodox superstition. The arguments put forth were neither new nor deep nor varied, but at any rate they lasted as long as the ale did; and on the part of the majority led to the conclusion from which they had started; that if ever Ethan returned to Kirkby his devilry and swimming should be subjected to a joint test. But for a while he and his party kept a prudent distance.

Roland would have set out on foot and unarmed, meaning to ride post as a safe opportunity offered, but there came a heavy fall of snow, which buried the roads and cancelled his mother's consent. He had to be content with the assurance that though he stood still every day lessened the distance between himself and his prince.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ORDEAL OF BATTLE

ACCORDING to popular belief Methodism was much the same thing politically as Jacobitism and religiously as popery; indeed Mr. John Wesley was commonly reputed to be then with the Pretender near Edinburgh. When therefore a day or two after that night ride the heads of the parish got Abel Marrott suddenly dismissed from his keepership, they were held to have acted with an opportune patriotism. About the same time Stockinger Simpson, the Methodist preacher, by special warrant of the rector of Kirkby and another justice of the division was brought before them, and on the sole oath of the constable was found to be an able-bodied man without lawful calling or sufficient maintenance, and as such a proper person to be pressed to serve His Majesty in the land or sea service. As he would not promise to quit Kirkby and return straight to his last place of settlement, he was at once pressed for a soldier and sent to the commissioners at Nottingham to be dealt with. What became of him nobody at Kirkby ever knew; he never went back.

These parochial matters naturally made much more stir in that little community than the news that came the same week that Carlisle had surrendered to the invading army. Beside the rector and the school-master only one man in the place claimed even to have heard of Carlisle, Higson the shoemaker, and upon close questioning his boast diminished to this, that in his father's time there was a tanner of that name at Mansfield. The snow melted away but left the undrained valleys of the Leen and Erewash mere marshes, the roads impassable

quagmires, and the thin dribble of news altogether ceased.

Suddenly the obstruction to the flow of information was removed. On Sunday, December 1, the enemy was known to be at Manchester on the authority of a copy of the *Nottingham Courant*, imported by an Arnold stockinger who hawked hose made of their own fine forest wool. Now Manchester was no mere name. Pedlar Jack, widely famed for the shortness of his measure and the length of his tongue, came from Manchester. The duke's army lay in Staffordshire. There was printed authority for the belief that to avoid him Charles Edward would dash across North Derbyshire and make for London by way of Nottingham. That must bring him within a mile or two of Kirkby. Old exaggerations of the numbers, stature, strength and ferocity of the petticoat-men were revived and enlarged upon; how they had dogs trained to join battle with men; how they themselves fought like wild beasts with tooth and claw; how they ate babies and drank fire and water. Once the people's fears were roused nothing seemed unbelievable. It was rumoured that there was a rising in the west of Welshmen as savage almost as the Highlanders, and a landing threatened or effected in the south of an army of bloodthirsty Frenchmen. It was no wonder therefore, that King George was believed to have fled to Hanover with the crown jewels in his pockets and his German "misses" two deep on each arm.

In the Jacobite family of the Nook there were hopes in place of the popular fears, hopes as wild as those fears were. It seemed to them that providence was bringing their desire to their very door; but every hour made Roland more impatient of that waiting part. The market for horses was firmer than ever. Large numbers had been requisitioned by the Government; many were snapped up at fancy prices by timorous householders preparing for flight. Cautious breeders withheld from the market stock which they might presently be needing for themselves, speculative ones hung back in hope of a further

rise. There could hardly be said to be a living thing on four practicable legs under the value of five pounds.

The following Thursday was a bitterly cold day with a howling hustling blast from the north-west. The dark rack scudded across under a sky of pearl-grey, and every now and then dropped a sprinkling of icy rain. Roland walked as far as Eastwood, eight miles of boggy ploughland, flooded meadow and, worst of all, of treacherous roads, equal to thrice as much of ordinary walking. He went afoot because he had no horse, and he wore his fine new wig because he had had his hair cut, such a coupling of the incongruous as subjected him by the way to much ridicule, of which he was by no means insensible. He endured that, and besides ran the risk of punishment for breaking bounds in order to see Bathiah Smittam, a proper unscrupulous horse-coper, who recked as little of loyalty as legality and was currently believed to have such a flow of lie and blasphemy, that he could persuade anybody who would listen to him into taking a jackass for a thoroughbred mare, swirling him irresistibly off from his firm incredulous footing into momentary gullibility. Bathiah had not even the proverbial jackass to offer Roland; he had just sold his last screw, a mere collection of horse infirmities only valuable as a curiosity, and sold her very well too even for him, to Miss Petican, a maiden lady whom the war scare had frightened out of an inveterate terror of everything four-footed except cats and house furniture. He did indeed begin with the usual backing of oaths and more than the usual immobility of feature to speak of a certain draught-ox which he could recommend as a good goer, well-bitted, quiet both in yoke, collar and saddle, a devilish bargain at ten guineas. But Roland refusing either to look or listen set off at once on his return. It was an hour past noon and a shower of icy rain was pelting down, when he entered Annesley park at that thickly-wooded lower end which was paled off and stocked with deer. Between the lodge and the Buckstead Stand he met Bob Radage,

son of the tenant of Annesley Woodhouse, riding towards him on a big-boned grey.

Bob, a heavily-built bandy-legged stripling of about the same age as Roland, was decked out in his grandfather's bushy wig, powdered from the family flour-dredger and roofed in by his father's best hat, which was clumsily done up in three cocks and ill-balanced over his right eye. Usually he had little to say to Roland, but for once he showed himself both friendly and talkative, stopped his horse, made the most of his new spurs, spoke resignedly of the lateness of the harvest, tried to display a sword which had modestly hidden itself away in the folds of his riding-cloak, asked if Roland knew when the Duke was coming again to hunt the forest, said he should be sorry to miss the cocking at Alfretton in Christmas week. While he waited in vain to be asked why, he fetched out his grandmother's silver snuff-box and took a liberal pinch. Whereat after a vain struggle for retention he sneezed thrice, reports like a horse-pistol's. To carry off his red discomfiture he rushed into bravado.

"The damnable mischief on't is, I've listed i' the Duke o' Kingston's, ye know, and ought to ha' marched with 'em to Derby last Saturday was sennight, ye know; but that villyand of a tailor warn't ready with my uniform. And now he's runned out o' the cloth, he says, and wain't promise me a rag on't afore Christmas, and our sergeant didn't think the war ud last while then; so I'm off as I am. And now, ye know, the ridgment lies raight tother side o' Derbyshire, nigh 'and a place called Newcastle - Newcastle under summat, not that tother un i' the next parish atop o' summat—and I'm damnably afear'd I shan't get theer afore the faighting's all ower. I reckoned on doing for a tidy few o' them Highland ragamuffins wi' this. What the devil's begotten it?"

He was trying to find his sword with his boot-toe. Now Roland, besides being afoot and weary and bemired from crown to sole, was disarmed and disgraced, and in no mood to be questioned from horseback by that self-



satisfied supporter of usurpation. He lifted a stout cudgel, his only weapon, and cried out :

"I'll save you both your journey and your disappointment. Stand! in King James's name!"

Bob stared at him, unready, open-eyed, open-mouthed, in utter astonishment. Roland seized his horse by the bridle.

"Are ye turned highwayman, Roly Surety?" said Bob.

"No, I'm what I always have been, a King James's man. And I'm here in his name to stop you and start you back home again."

"We'll soon see," said Bob.

He lifted his whip, but Roland was beforehand and rapped him smartly over the wrist, so that the whip fell from his hand. Bob swore with remarkable fluency for him; and "D'ye want to faight?" said he:

"Why not?"

"Let go of my hoss then."

Roland released the bridle; Bob, encumbered by cloak, sword, spur and his own clumsy eagerness, blundered to the ground, and with one arm through the reins held up his fists just as he was.

"Coom on," said he, "and see if I can't gie yer a sour thump or two."

"Look ye here, Mister Robert Radage," said Roland loftily; "we're not boys squabbling over a game of push-pin, but men fighting for the crown of England. So draw your sword, if you please, and fight like a gentleman."

"Where's yourn?"

"It was stole from me by you Protestants."

"If yo say I stole it, Roly Surety, I'll—yo're a great big liar, that's all."

"Anyhow they weren't Catholics who stole it. So draw your sword, and I must do the best I can with this."

Roland advanced his staff athwart his body in the proper posture of the hanging-guard.

"Are ye a bit cracked i' th' head, Roly?" asked Bob anxiously.

"I'll crack yours afore I've done," said Roland.

"We'll see about that," said Bob; and going a few yards aside to the nearest tree, a beech, he buckled his horse's reins round its trunk. Then he took off cloak and coat—the cloak a family heirloom of unknown date, the silver-laced coat descended from his great-uncle Stephen, temp. Caroli Secundi—and having flung them across the saddle turned again to face Roland.

But "Stay a bit!" said he. "I'd forgot. I've donned a fine frilled linen shirt on to-day that's fayther's best and a bran-new pair o' buckskin breeches, so's I may go gay to the war. Now unless yo promise to respect 'em I wain't faight at all."

"I promise nothing," answered Roland. "If you want to keep 'em from a bloodying or a muddying you must doff 'em off."

"How can I? By the roadside, drabbit it? If that milk-wench at the hall coomed braungeing by she'd miscall me sore, the loud-voiced brazen-faced besom. And if madam seed me, almost as nak'd as a foot-racer, she'd be i' the raight to hae me ducked and drowned i' the pond."

"You shan't have that for a get-off neither."

Roland led the way up the riding; but a little way past the Buckstead Stand he turned off through the trees into a tiny hollow squeezed in between two knolls, and called the Irish Dale from some long-forgotten happening. As they went he said:

"Let's understand what we're fighting about. If you're bet you're stopped from siding with your what-ye-call-'im King George, and if I'm bet I'm stopped from siding with King James. Is that agreed on?"

"As yo like," said Bob. "Though I don't know but what they'll call it murder."

"Murder? Whose?"

"Yourn of course," said Bob.

"Hadn't you better do't, Bob Radage, afore you get yourself hanged for't?"

In the middle of the Irish Dale there was steeply rising ground on each hand, and the trees were so thickly planted in front of them and behind them, though leafage there was none, that they were screened from observation on every side. The squittering shower had ceased but the wind cut like a knife, when Roland stopped and waited while Bob stripped to the skin. Having carefully stowed his shirt and breeches in a thorn-bush he resumed his top-boots to save his feet from chance thorns, and from a joint motive of decency and thrift put his waistcoat on again inside out. But the rehabilitation was only partial, for the waistcoat was of antiquated pattern, and though it descended decorously in front as low as his knees, behind it was so scandalously carved away that it but just touched his waist. Thus equipped he looked ruefully at his still sheathed sword.

"Mun I?" said he.

"You mun," answered Roland. "We're to fight like gentlemen, if you please."

Bob sighed, a sigh that had the volume of a groan, and drew—or the action being so entirely without martial swagger one might rather say extracted—his sword. Then shivering and handy-legged he confronted his antagonist; who said, somewhat scornfully I fear:

"Now if you still think you're at any odds by me, you'd better say so afore we begin."

"Well, I do feel a bit dithery,<sup>1</sup> that's the pure truth. And it does take the spunk out of a man to fancy as there's mebbe somebody behind making game on him. Yo wain't ha' noticed, but my legs are just a tinety bit tother side o' knock-kneed; hardly a hair's brede,<sup>2</sup> but the wenches allus hae summat to say again iv'rybody."

"There's no wench nigh; there's only an old hind and her calf."

"I know; but I shall need to be looking round iv'ry hafe second to keep hold o' my sureness on't."

<sup>1</sup> Shivery.

<sup>2</sup> Breadth.

Roland quickly and impatiently threw off his clothes, shoes, stockings and all except shirt and waistcoat, and left them in a careless heap on the ground.

"Now I owe you noat," said he. "If I've my shirt, you've your boots. Are you ready?"

"I mun be, I reckon," answered Bob.

In a state of unprepared readiness then. But lacking skill to state his own case he left unspoken what yet he was disablingly conscious of, that however appearances might lie the disadvantage was wholly on his side. The sword was a weapon which he had hardly learnt to carry sheathed with any assurance. The bare blade filled him with fear, firstly for his own skin, but at the same time he was too good-natured and unhardened not to shrink from making bloody incision on his neighbour's. Moreover on that slimy tricky surface his new top-boöts gave him a footing much less secure than Roland had with his bare soles. The consequence was that his knuckles were ~~raised~~, his poll knocked, his shoulders basted, his ribs prodded while he floundered about hesitating cut and thrust. When he did at last bring off a haphazard swishing blow, which only failed to shear away a slice of Roland's shoulder because it lighted on the flat, he was seized with a homicidal horror and gave way at every joint. Staggering back, helped by a violent lunge full on his breastbone from Roland's staff, he caught one of his spurs in a tangled tussock and was flung heels-up into the midst of a huge bramble bush. The bramble opened its long trailing arms to receive him into its spiny bosom, then drawing again about him hugged him in an amorous embrace.

He bellowed with the pain, but without leaving more flesh behind than even he could well spare he might not rise until Roland went to his help, cut away some of the fondest of the shoots with his own sword and gave him a hand-up. His rear, sadly scored with a criss-cross of many deep and bleeding scratches, was a sight to see, piteous counterpart of the woeful face which he presented to a front view. But a loud and merry laugh, incongru-

ous sound, broke the flow of Bob's complaint. He looking back and Roland looking up saw through the trees a young gentleman a-horseback. It was William Chaworth; and that laugh evidently had come from him, for he was still laughing, laughing loud and merrily, a full-breathed laugh that made him hold his head back and swell out his chest.

"Good Lord, 'tis the young squire!" said Bob, and made a grab for his shirt.

"Stay!" said Roland. "Do you acknowledge you're bet?"

"Ay, I'm bet; thanks to these damned awk'ard spurs and the sleary ground."

Still the young squire laughed, holding his sides, until the tears ran in streams from his eyes and he had much ado to keep his seat. Bob having drawn on his shirt and breeches ventured to turn his rueful countenance to the laugher.

"If yo'd a back like mine, sir," he said, "~~yo'd~~ be laughing tother side o' your mouth."

"Nay," said Chaworth, "'t isn't your smart back I'm laughing at, Bob Radage, so much as the face you put on't. But what are you fighting about—if you call it a fight?"

Roland thought the matter was being treated with improper levity.

"About the succession to the crown of England," he answered loftily. "You are witness, sir, that Mr. Radage acknowledges defeat."

"What of that?"

"So far as our agreement goes James the Third is king, in fact as well as by divine right."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed the young squire, and touching his horse with his heel rode in between the combatants. "Hurrah! I, William Chaworth, come into that agreement."

He tossed his hat up into the air. It lodged in the branches of the beech overhead. He did not mind its failure to return to hand, but said eagerly:

"D'ye know that His Highness is at Derby?"

"At Derby?"

"Got there yesterday. An express came this forenoon with the news."

Roland's heart gave a leap. Then the kingdom was as good as won! If he had only known when he was at Eastwood, nearly half-way thither, he would never have turned back. Bob, being bothered by his buttons, gave little attention.

"I want to go to him, sore," said Chaworth, "but mamma won't hear on't. Uncle Pole will be there, I warrant ye."

Angry tears started to Roland's eyes.

"What mads me," he said, "is that I've been clean out of it just for want of a horse. The tyrants won't let us Catholics keep one fit for a gentleman's use. They've ta'en my sword too."

"We're cousins in Derbyshire Catholics, the chances. Right good folk too; except one bad woman."

"But I start to-morrow afoot. I've given my word."

Chaworth leapt to the ground.

"You shan't walk," he said, "if you're content to ride." He offered the bridle to Roland's hand. "I would have gone with you but for a promise mamma squeezed out of me."

Roland felt a proud unwillingness.

"I've been wanting this long while to buy a horse," he said.

"I can't serve that turn," answered Chaworth; "I'm no horse-coper. I give it to the cause."

The young men's eyes met, perhaps accidentally, and each saw that in the other's which moved him to put forth a simultaneous hand.

"For the king," said Roland. "Madam your mother being willing."

"Oh, there's no doubt of that; she's true blue. But since poor Pat died she won't let me out of her sight. Yet"—here the young man's handsome open face dark-

ened with the shadow of an aversion—"yet if anybody could persuade my noble cousin Lord Byron to give his person to this quarrel as he has done his money, I'd put my promise in my left-hand pocket and take French leave to go for the mere pleasure of fighting on tother side."

Then in a few words it was agreed, that with Mistress Chaworth's consent Roland should find the horse and his owner by the Crabtree Stand on the morrow two hours before sunrise. The young squire having mounted again borrowed Roland's staff to recover his hat. His "Your servant, sir," quite overlooked poor Bob; and so he rode away in a mood compounded of delight at being concerned in so gallant an adventure and mortification that he had to give up the leading part in it to another.

Meanwhile the combatants had finished dressing, very slowly and shamefacedly on Bob's part, and now they returned to the tree to which his horse had been secured. But Bob had been so grievously lacerated just where he touched saddle, that he was forced immediately to dismount again and walk. Side by side the two young men went up through the deer park and out into more open ground. They could see the old hall on their left, backed by an old church and fronted by gardens. Bob the while was complaining sorely of his ill fortune, blubbering aloud for shame and vexation after a very boyish and unrestrained fashion.

"I shouldn't ha' minded," he kept saying in nearly the same words, exactly the same sense; "King Georgie may go to Hanover or the devil for me; but what'll the folk say at home? What'll the lads say? But it isn't that nayther so much, nor yet the ruination to my fine clothes, it's what'll Bell say?"

Said Roland at length between pity, contempt and impatience, "Do you want to beg off, Bob Radage?"

Bob put what dignity he had left—his original stock was not great—in his broad red tear-beslabbered face and answered:

"Yo've no raight to say so, Roly Surety, and if yo say't again I'll faight ye for't; with fisses. 'Twere a

fair bargain, barring these damned spurs, only"—here his whip hand went up again to his eyes—"only what'll Bell say?"

"How should I know? Neither Bell nor Betty's anything to me. If ever I put my finger into my eye it shan't be about a girl."

"Don't be so short wi' me."

But that sentimental side of the case which to poor Bob seemed nearest to pity most moved Roland's fancy-free disdain. At last after repetition on repetition of Bell's name he stopped and said:

"I won't hold you to't against your will. Turn again if so please you. But hark to me, Mr. Robert Radage; this match is off and I'll make another with you. When next we meet, as we're bound to do, we'll settle who's to be king not by a scuffle in the sludge but after a gentlemanly fashion, Mr. Radage. And I'll have my silver spurs on too."

"D'ye mean it, Roly?"

"I shouldn't say it if I didn't mean it."

Bob's face put on a tear-stained cheerfulness with extraordinary speed.

"Thankee kindly. Yo're a good fellow at bottom, Roly, though yo're so quick to rear your back up. Here's my hand to't. Now I moot say good-bye, or I shan't reach Nottingham town afore pitch-dark. I'm to stop the night there at Uncle's. Well, look out for me and I'll look out for yo."

Bob leapt to saddle, forgetful of his wounds; but immediately checking his horse's impatience looked back with a sheepish solemnity on his face and said:

"We're going to the wars, both on's, and we never know what may happen. Only wi' me in one army and yo in tother there's bound to be warm work."

He backed his horse up and put into Roland's hand a little parcel, clumsily wrapped in coarse brown paper.

"What's this?" asked Roland.

"I seed Bell last night—Bell Brandrith, ye know, o' Sutton——"



"I thought we'd done talking about her."

"Don't say so, Roly. 'Twas only for an hour or two, and we seemed to be allus talking of some nonsense or other, so I couldn't ever bring mysen into the proper frame o' mind. Give it to her, do, o' Sunday; afore church, not after. Her mother allus wakkens up wonderful sharp-sighted after her sarmon sleep."

As soon as the last word was out Bob spurred up and trotted off, rather out of shamefacedness than any scheming to baulk refusal. Nevertheless he did thus completely nullify the rejoinder, though Roland pitched his voice higher and higher after a retreating inattentive back.

"Here! take it back! I can't! I won't! Besides I'm going myself afore Sunday." But so manifestly was the words' carrying power insufficient to overtake Bob's hearing that the last of them, the sum of them, was suffered to drop to an ordinary petulant pitch. "And I'll have no truck with no wench of them all to ~~please~~ nobody."

Meanwhile Bob, forgetful of his wounds, unsuspecting of his fate, trotted cheerfully off towards Nottingham; towards Culloden too, as befell, and that charge of Kingston's Horse, wherein he blundered his thick honest head into the way of Macdonald's desperate claymore, and so never came back to Bell and the pleasant forest-land. But why Roland failed to keep tryst with him either there or elsewhere remains to be told at greater length.

## CHAPTER XI

### BLACK FRIDAY

AT five o'clock in the morning Roland was up and dressed. His mother sat beside him while he ate his breakfast by candlelight. She pinned a white cockade to the lining of his hat ready for occasion; she fastened his black satin stock with a diamond-studded buckle, her last gift, and at parting when he knelt for her blessing kissed him with a face of much courage.

His wig had been well powdered by Press and was crowned with a Kevenhuller of the right martial cock, but the mere frippery of his adornment, his new stock-buckle, his stone knee-buckles, the lace to his shirt and the embroidery to his coat and waistcoat—these last the handiwork of his mother and Press—was of course covered by his long plain riding-coat and jack-boots. Whereby indeed he made the more gallant an appearance and the more conformable to the business he was on. The purposeful gravity which had settled on his brow seemed to have taken the boyishness from his fresh cheeks. He had not, you may be sure, forgotten the silver spurs.

Said Press as soon as the chink of them was out of the house, "There won't be a prettier young gentleman go forth neither on foot nor horseback in a month of Fridays."

I am afraid his equipment left Fortuna straitened for many a day. But she said nothing; her motherly pride did not measure itself against the maid's. Perhaps the chief feeling excited in her by that speech was a wish that it had been any other day of the week. She went up-stairs to pray. Her rosary went often through her fingers, and

she fasted as strictly as if it had been that penitential Friday before Easter.

It was a moonless morning, the wind to the north-east with a hard and cloudy sky, very suitable for such a stealing away as Roland intended. The Crabtree Stand was on the side of the deer-park nearest to the Nook, but still he had a two-mile trudge to it through the mire in jack-boots. And if the appointed meeting failed through Mistress Chaworth's opposition or other hindrance? The thought kept coming to him by the way. For answer he set his teeth, and vowed in that case to follow as he was the advance of the swift invading army until he overtook it, though it were a hundred miles. An unnecessary resolution, for the lady of Annesley was glad to keep her son by her at the cost of such a substitution. So he found William Chaworth at the proper place in the thick dusk of the trees with the gelding, a powerful animal, rather sure than fast but of the right sort for a winter's campaign. His greeting and Roland's thanks were brief. The face of each was to the other but a glimmer in the black.

"Good-bye, Sorrel," said the young squire. "You're going where your master would fain have gone. I beg you'll not spare him."

"'Twill be my bounden duty," said Roland, "to go with him where his master would have gone. I shan't need to go further and shan't dare to go less far."

The young squire was conscious of a change of tone. Roland spoke gravely, soberly; as though the vigil of one night, the activity of one morning had added years to the gasconading boy of the day before.

"This sword is mamma's gift. It has seen service already."

"My humble thanks and duty to her. Pray tell her I will strive to carry it so that it shan't know it has changed hands."

"If you have the good fortune to speak with the prince, tell him you come with your own body but William Chaworth's horse and sword."

"And spirit, sir. I'm vastly beholden to you for all three. If I do anything at all, sure 'twill be wholly theirs."

Roland trotted away down the dark still riding. He had in his pocket a draft on his mother's banker for five-and-twenty guineas. He was to go to Nottingham and cash it, and thence push on with all speed to Derby. What gloom of light the austere sky possessed it wrapped up in its clouds and gave none forth. The road was dark under him, before him; dark was the ground on either hand. At the Wighay there was a glimmer of candle-light through the loopholes of the great barn, and he heard the regular thud of flails; but he met nobody on that side of Hucknall save a couple of red-coated fox-hunters riding to a meet on Selston common. But between Hucknall and Bulwell—and by then there was a wan half-awakened gleam along the pools that flecked the road—he met an amount of traffic very unusual, especially at so early an hour, coming from Nottinghamwards.

First a smart chariot and six went floundering by with more haste than speed, its roof piled up with heavy packages and more persons squeezed together inside and out, gentlemen, ladies, children, and servants, than I guess had ever before found accommodation therein. Soon after a man passed on a stout cob, a Nottingham tradesman apparently, and behind him on a pillion a lady pale with fear; which Roland supposed, and very reasonably, to be on account of her cavalier's indifferent horsemanship. A little further and the road was taken up by a standing wagon-load of odds and ends of furniture; the driver stood up to his knees in mire and flogged and cursed his team. The poor animals strained and plunged, but could not haul the fore-wheels out of the deep slough into which they had sunk. To avoid them a long string of pack-horses variously laden had to take to the ditch, which was indeed hardly deeper, wider or wetter than many of the ruts. After that came in close succession a carrier's cart, a party of half-a-dozen

well-dressed horsemen and horsewomen, a donkey carriage and another wagon crammed with household goods; which made Roland think there must be a general house-flitting going on in the neighbourhood.

Considering these and similar obstructions together with the vile state of the road, Roland and his steed must be held to have done extremely well in reaching Bulwell, nine miles from home and only four from the county town, by what time the day was fully awake. The first person whom he met in that village was riding an old grey mare in poor condition and going very lame. He stopped Roland and said:

"Young sir, may I inquire whether that quadruped which you bestride is purchasable upon reasonable terms?"

"Upon no terms whatever, sir," answered Roland; "he is already devoted to a cause."

The first speaker dejectedly dropped the hand which he had raised to bespeak attention. He was a very respectable elderly person in broad-brimmed hat, full-bottomed tie-wig and black coat, under which appeared the skirts of a clergyman's cassock.

"You should account yourself thrice fortunate in the possession of such a steed at such a crisis. Believe me, at Nottingham since the news arrived it would be worth more than a man."

"Prithee of what news do you speak, sir?"

"I might reply without hyperbole, there is no news but one news. Since we have been apprised that the rebels at Derby spent all yesterday in hearing the superstitious compilation which they call mass, and in sharpening their bloodthirsty swords for an immediate march on Nottingham, we have no ears for lesser tidings. But it doth not behove one who hath been conspicuous both in pulpit and print for the defence of Protestantism and the true Hanoverian succession to loiter by the way, while as yet escape is possible. Necessity doth *pro tempore* suspend the common law of pity, doth by a quasi-martial law put us under the dictatorship of self."

So saying he brought his whip down upon his mare's flank, and at the third stroke induced her to a hobbling walk. Roland rode on at a quicker pace, passed a lady and two gentlemen in a chaise, then was stayed on the green by an innkeeper, a tub-bellied purple-nosed watery-eyed man, who coming out of his house and across the road to him said :

"Sir, there's a gentleman in my parlour who'll give you a hunderd pound for that hoss."

"He is not for sale," said Roland.

"I don't think you heard me right, sir: I said a hunderd and fifty pound."

"And I said he's not for sale," answered Roland impatiently.

"You moan't reckon on prices holding up after to-day, sir."

Roland's horse and impatience were both astart, but he checked them on a thought and said :

"What sort of a road is it between Nottingham and Derby?"

The innkeeper gave him a sly look and answered :

"The road's good summer and winter for them as needs it, but it'll be strangely rucked up just now with all these goings and comings. Look!"

There was no need of the innkeeper's finger. Slowly and conspicuously a wagon was crawling past drawn by four oxen and crowded with well-dressed people, but with no luggage except a few light bags and parcels.

"Where there's one such here there'll be fifty, ay, a hunderd along Derby road. So 't has been ever sin him you know on comed to Derby."

"Then 'tis a general flight?"

"Noat else. Besides and moreover, sir, at the ingates of Nottingham and all the villages along the road there's watchmen placed, who ax all sort of foolish hindering questions o' busy men. So if I was going to Derby to look up a friend or saddle with an unfriend, I should go by Broxtowe and Stapleford. You'll miss noat but a

sight of the gallers and the wyndmills on the Nottingham lings."

Roland was the more impatient to be at Derby, the more afraid of going by Nottingham. If he remembered that he had a note to cash it was to no effect.

"How far do you make it?"

"If your business wain't wait, sir, I should say, with luck and plenty o' good Nottingham whipcord you could be at Derby in easy time for an early dinner."

"Thank you; if it can be done I'll do it."

"Harkee, sir, in your ear. When your friends coom in mebbe you'll say a good word for me. I've 'commodation and appetite for a good deal more business than what I do."

Having taken the innkeeper's further directions Roland rode eagerly on. It seemed to him that he was going not to take part in a struggle but to look on at a triumph. Using not overmuch Nottingham whipcord he passed Broxtowe Hall, but in crossing Trowell Moor luck failed him and inopportunately he bethought himself of Bob Radage's unexecuted commission. It is true that he had immediately if ineffectively declined the trust; nevertheless Bell's token, still in the pocket of his coat left hanging to dry on the kitchen wall, drew his attention from the track before him for a minute or two of vain impatient half-regrets. When his outlook was clear again he had gone so far astray, that after an hour's deviations by Cossall and Ilkeston he found himself at Kirk Hallam instead of Sandiacre. After that in lack of a well-defined road he went wrong between Locko and Chaddesden, but was set right by a farmer's wife riding to market between two panniers of fruit and dairy-stuff, and so reached the latter village, two miles from Derby, before one o'clock. He stopped at the "Wilmot Arms" to bait his horse and drink a pot of ale. In the kitchen a man was declaring that the "Prince of the Highlandmen" had heard French mass yestermorn in All Saints' Church. That information new-fired Roland's eagerness. It sounded like a consecration of his party's

success. He was well pleased too when the landlord refused to change him a banknote for five shillings, saying :

"Nay, 'twain't do, master; I mun hae your silver. Times is tickle. There's many a man looks firm at his shou'lders as stans very cockling on's feet."

He called for his horse and galloped off. Soon he turned on to the Nottingham road and saw a fair church-tower in front of him. He stopped and asked a passer-by what church it was. All Saints' he was told. His heart gave a great leap, as if he had at last come into the princely presence. He kept his eye upon that blessed tower, made it his lodestar by which to steer. It was conspicuous on his left when he crossed the river by the narrow pack-horse bridge; then he lost it behind the houses. But he kept looking for it on his left; did not mistake St. Alkmund's for it, still less squat St. Michael's—"A Protestant church that," he said to himself—and soon it again confronted him unmistakably, seemed to come out of the line of common buildings into the road to meet him. He leapt down, he took no care of his horse, he hastened to the church door. It chanced to be unlocked; he passed in. He dropped on his knees and crossed himself before the heretical table which had been deemed worthy to serve for the nonce as base to a eucharistic altar. His eyes were wet with tears.

That was the culmination of an enthusiasm. He fell away from it as soon as he rose; he passed into a common curiosity. He had never before been in a church of any kind. His eyes went round the building; he criticized mentally the fabric and the furniture. But he did not dwell on them; he went out and again mounted his horse. Then was the time when he had thought to bring his white cockade out of retirement; but he let it lie; he was conscious of the uneasy beginnings of a disappointment.

He had expected to have the Prince's presence signally impressed upon him. He missed the Prince's presence. There was no passage through the street of armed men



either kilted or breeched, there was no thronging of unarmed lookers-on, no martial squealing of bagpipe or fife, no hurrahing or ringing of bells, no overflowings of a loyal jubilation or a disaffected terror.

He rode on. Many dwelling-houses and shops still had their windows shuttered, as though day had only begun for early risers. There were indeed many people out of doors, and several times he saw acquaintances stop one another, exchange a hand-shake and express a sober satisfaction; but what was on their faces seemed rather to be the subsidence than the flood of an excitement. More persons were going in than coming forth, and those who showed the most agitation might for aught that appeared be merely hurrying to overtake their dinner-time. In short he had seen almost as much bustle on a Saturday market at Nottingham. In all likelihood it was indeed market day at Derby, though it was Friday; for he went at haphazard straight into the market-place, and saw as it were the lees of a market there;—a pen of geese, a lowing cow with dripping udders and a muzzled calf at her side piteously bleating, two or three swing ploughs and pig-troughs, half-a-dozen women with maunds of butter and eggs, a Gipsy beldame hawking horn spoons, cornel-tree skewers and new thorn-wood swipples for old flails, a simpler with his comfrey and dandelion roots and bundles of dried herbs, and a loud-voiced pedlar of holland socks, four pair a shilling. But few as were the sellers they outnumbered the buyers. What surprised him most of all was the hearing some loud voices from the "George Inn" singing—

"George is magnanimous,  
Subjects unanimous,  
Peace to us bring  
His fame is glorious,  
Reign meritorious,  
God save the King."

He could only surmise that the minstrels were under the influence of a drunkard's courage. He rode past the

shambles, which then occupied part of the square, and stood in the open space beyond for a minute or two, mystified, refusing to be disheartened, uncertainly revolving his next movement; and as he stood, suddenly the bells of All Saints' broke forth into a jubilatory peal. He was encouraged into addressing an elderly tradesman, a chandler, who stood on the pavement outside his shop door; in his workaday shirt-sleeves and apron, it is true, but his shop-front was still partly shuttered and there was a holiday leisureliness in his way of warming his thumbs in his waistcoat armholes.

"Yon bells make a merry sound of it, sir," said he.

"There's reason in't," answered the chandler; "more than what there is in most merriment."

"Ay, for doubtless 'tis in welcome of His Highness the Prince."

The chandler looked at him suspiciously from under an up-puckered brow and seemed of a mind to go indoors, but stopped on his threshold to say darkly:

"You're true to the mark; they're a-welcoming his departure."

"He has gone then? Already? But I might have known. Stop, pray, and tell me by what road."

The chandler, though half of a mind not to answer, did answer but with a surly brevity.

"The same road as he came in by."

"Ah?" But Roland pushed aside his monosyllabic surprise with a businesslike "Be good enough to direct me thither."

"I don't think, young man, you'll find it a very profitable direction. However 'tis the Ashbourne road. Take the turning to your right hand and—— But here come those who'll save my tongue and your memory."

At that moment there was a certain movement just beginning on the other side of the market-place; first a sudden scuttling into doorways and round corners on the part of such persons as happened to be standing about the pump; and immediately on that the entrance at a run of a gang of such armed ragamuffins as Roland

had never before seen, a full score of them of all sizes and ages from the white-bearded ruffian to the smooth-chinned imp of mischief; but all filthy and betattered, some most indecently, bareheaded, bare-legged, and to an inland man horridly outlandish. The tradesman backed through his doorway, whence he said:

"Those are some of the—Prince's gentlemen; the last of 'em I hope. If you follow 'em they'll lead you unmistakably the way you want to go; which, as I take it, is the gainest road to the gallows."

He shut his door sharply on the last words, and Roland heard from without the hurried clatter of lock, bolt and chain. Meanwhile the Highlanders, having a clear market before them, swept down it at a speed which not being hurried was much greater than it seemed. Some seized a goose apiece, wrung its neck and carried it off over shoulder, some pillaged the nearest market-women's baskets and the open shops. One man with his Lochaber axe smashed the window in the only shop-front thereabouts that was glazed, for the rarity of the crash I suppose, and snatched thence a lady's fan; but all was done with so practised a dexterity that it did not break their steady rush through. By the time that Roland had realized what they were, they had swooped past him and disappeared round the next corner. Instantly the townspeople were back in the market-place. They looked curiously at the broken window, they commiserated, with hands in pockets, the plundered butter-women. The elderly chandler unlocked his door and peeped forth.

But Roland did not again consult him. He roused himself from the disgusted astonishment which had fallen on him, and turned his back on the market-place. He did not consciously accept the guidance of those savage partisans; what he would have done consciously would have been to reject it disdainfully; yet on arriving at the nearest corner he looked the way that they had taken. They were already out of sight. He stopped in doubt. Just then the triumphant clangour of two or three other peals of bells was added to the first. He withdrew

his eyes from looking to the right, and saw before him a sign standing out from the rank of buildings on the left hand of the street, and inscribed "Fortune Inn, John Every." It was not however that loud gilt lettering which had taken his attention, but a coat-of-arms, gules, azure and or; which for crest had the figure of a robed woman standing on a wheel, bearing a palm branch in one hand and a poised javelin in the other. Above her was enscrolled the motto "Victrix vel Vindex Fortuna" in smaller characters. The same heraldic device was engraved on a seal which his mother had given him for a bauble to his Pinchbec's watch, and was also impressed on her jewel casket, though he would hardly have taken so much notice but for the oddity of her name being in it. He rode down to the sign and reined up in front of a respectable inn.

"What may I have the honour of doing for ye, sir?"

Probably it was John Every, certainly it was a highly respectable, sly-looking, dry-looking little old fellow in jacket and apron and a small well-powdered wig, who had come forth and put that pertinent question. To which Roland replied:

"You may, if you please, point me out the way to the Ashbourne road."

"Have you dined, sir?"

"Not yet."

"Then let me say, sir, Ashbourne road can wait your good pleasure; but your dinner's smoking-hot and will spoil by waiting."

Roland was immediately and altogether of his adviser's opinion. It would seem that his sunken spirits had come to the reinforcement of his hunger, which for the last two hours at least had been trying in vain to get heard. He alighted, gave the reins to a stable-boy and followed the landlord up the dirty steps and along a dirty stone-paved passage. Half-way down his conductor stopped at a door and invited him to look in.

"My great parlour, sir," he said with a mixture of pride and dismay.

Roland saw a long low-ceiled oak-wainscoted apartment, whose natural gloom was not relieved by the dying fire in the huge chimney. From end to end stretched a massy oaken table littered with platters, drinking vessels and leavings of food in a swinish disorder. Of the oaken chairs some had fallen, the rest stood anyhow along the floor, which was strewn with filthy straw.

"You see, sir," said the landlord, "I've bedded thirty guests here for the last two nights, as well as boarded 'em; besides as many more in other parts of the house; gentlemen from north'ards, sir." Roland understood, and his first feeling was a rush of gladness that he had not come in the night before. "When we burn that straw, sir, we shall do murder; ay, to tens o' thousands."

They passed on and by the next door entered another and much smaller room, similarly furnished but with everything in good order, a bright coal fire on the hearth, the clean floor freshly sanded, chairs ranged along the table and covers ready set for some half-dozen guests. The polished steel and pewter seemed to repeat the fire's gleam the more brightly for being laid on the bare dark board.

"This is our market-day, sir," said the innkeeper again. "Every Friday I purvide an ordinary and sit at the head o' the table in yon great dining-room and look down and see ne'er a chair unfilled. But to-day, sir, through the slobbery weather and unpassable roads and other raisons the market's but a poor un, as you may have seed, so there'll be only you and me to put knife and fork to as fine a pickled leg o' pork as ever came boiled to table. But I'm none complaining, sir. If you'll be pleased to be content wi' your meat and your carver, I shall be more than content wi' my company."

"Thank you," said Roland; "I can be content with less. Just a dish of any sort of fish; that's all I shall require."

The little old man looked at him slyly with his bright eyes and said:

"Ah, sir, I see you're o' the same way o' thinking

about victuals as some o' my Highland officers, so the eels from the Trent and the fat carp from the Darrent, which they ordered but couldn't wait while we cooked 'em, will come in raight handsomely for your dinner. 'Twill be but a delay of twenty minutes; you'll need all that time to warm your hands into the proper trim for knife and fork"—the innkeeper drew one of the roomiest of the chairs to the fireside—"and I'll send ye in a tankard of my best home-brewed."

Twenty minutes is long to a hungry man, and Roland's appetite raged the more fiercely for its long suppression; but the home-brewed was good, the tankard capacious, and the fire with its merry face and under-breath talk did its best to make the waiting pass; with so much success that the twenty minutes had hardly seemed to him more than a whole hour, when Master Every came again and with many apologies ushered him up-stairs to a little sparely furnished room that looked on the yard. Roland's eyes went round its walls but stopped at their only decoration, a copy of the Golden Rules of Charles I. Perhaps the innkeeper thought that they were particularly directed to the sixth rule, "Make no comparisons"; he said apologetically:

"I thought, sir, you'd be quieter here. With all these goings and comings the town seems unsattled like. Now the fire's got well agate it'll soon warm the air."

The fire had evidently been hurriedly kindled with live embers from another hearth. The landlord was probably aware that the vulgar prejudice was unusually strong just then against persons who ate fish on Fridays. Roland however had no time to speculate on motives, for immediately a brown-frocked blue-aproned waiter brought in a dish of eels still hissing softly of their sharp discipline.

## CHAPTER XII

### FORTUNE INN

"LANDLORD," said Roland presently, "what is the first town on the road to London?"

"Loughborough, sir."

"How far is't to Loughborough?"

"Seventeen mile."

"And the next to that?"

"Leicester, sir."

Thought Roland to himself, "I shall march with him into Leicester."

It would seem that John Every's excellent viands had not only renewed Roland's bodily strength but also fed his weakening hopefulness. And all the while the church bells were going ding-dong, clitter-clatter-clang. If the ringers did not pull in relays, surely they had good Jacobitish arms of their own. Every now and then too there was heard, echoing down the passage and up the stairs, a sound, at first a mere buzz, soon at its loudest and soon stilled again. It was the tramp of feet passing the open street-door and therewith a varied mingling of boisterous speech, song, laughter and maybe a fervid huzza, an odd one or a numerous chorus. Roland understood that the Derby folk were at last waking up to their political satisfaction. After his second helping of boiled carp garnished with lemons and fragrant of rosemary, sweet marjoram and savory, he did not decline the offer of apple-fritters; but he ate in a growing impatience with his eyes upon his watch, which he had unfobbed half through the meal and laid on the table before him. It pointed to a quarter past three when at last he again pocketed it, and springing up with his mouth full and still a leaving on his plate, asked in the

same breath for his horse, his score and the direction of Ashbourne road.

"As for your score, sir," answered the host, "a shilling is soon said; your nag has had a good feed and a rest"—here he sent away the drawer who had been waiting on them, and then shut the door—"but as for Ashbourne road, sir"—he dropped his voice almost to a whisper—"Ashbourne road, sir—I hope you've noat about you more marketable than your skin."

"Why that?"

"There's a many thieves on that road just now, breeched and unbreeched, footpads, common rogues and gentlemen highwaymen."

"I'll risk my skin and whatever I may have that's more valuable."

"I'll warrant ye, sir; but you'll hardly get e'er a body to wager you a tester on the happy side of the chance."

"My horse, if you please."

Roland threw a quarter-guinea down on the table and began to push a hasty arm through a sleeve of his riding-coat. The landlord went to the window as if to draw the curtain.

"It's mizzling wi' rain, a sorry disperritless pigging sort o' rain. By four o' th' clock it'll be night, by five pitch-dark, as if the ground was in black for the sky and the sky for the ground."

"There's a moon," said Roland, and resolutely büttoned his coat.

"Ay, sir, I've heerd a scholar say there's allus a moon; but us unlarn'd folk can't allus see't."

The landlord did not draw the curtain; perhaps that his guest might ponder the contrast between the fire's roseate familiarity and the repellent non-aspect of the outer twilight, as represented by a twenty-foot run of blank brick wall coped with twelve inches of dead sky.

"If you please, my horse," answered Roland, as if both to the speaker and the prospect.

The landlord took up the quarter-guinea and went out. Roland put on his hat and walked down to the street-



door. He stood on the bottom step, looking forth into a gloom obscurely lighted by escapings from the clouds and curtained windows. The wind had dropped and the air was saturated with a chill drizzle, which seemed to strike the back as directly as the palm of the hand which he drew from its warm pocket and held out to it. Yet there was evidently a less disconsolate side to the town. The bells were still ringing, or had ceased and begun again. There was the sound of the frequent firing of guns near by and of much shouting and hip-hip-hurrahing. He strolled to the corner, whence there was a view of the market-place.

The square was lighted up by a huge bonfire, round which half-a-dozen blue-coated butchers were executing their peculiar form of music with marrow-bone and cleaver. It was thronged with people always on the move, pushing to and fro, jostling one another, shouting, singing, letting off firearms, squibs and crackers, with every sign of popular joy, a proper babel. Knowing that Charles Edward and his triumphant army were within half a day's march, it did not occur to him that those public rejoicings could be for aught but the advent of a Scotch deliverance. As he entered the inn again three well-dressed men came out arm in arm triumphantly drunk, God-blessing the king and damning all his enemies. They elbowed Roland aside, but their incivility did not ruffle his satisfaction. It was understood that though one man might be politically happy without being tipsy a community could not.

The door of the room that he had first occupied happening to be open as he went by, he could not avoid looking in. It was handsomely lighted up with wax candles in pewter. At the table was a very respectable company seated round a punch-bowl, talking, laughing, snuff-taking and especially drinking, their faces flushed with the fire, with the punch and a radiant joy. As the gentleman at the head of the table rose to propose the toast of "Liberty and Property," Roland passed on.

"Everybody seems wonderful happy to-night," he said

right cheerfully to the landlord, who was waiting for him outside his room.

"Ay, sir. They think they've raison for't."

Master Every beckoned him back into the room, shut the door and put his change in his hand, saying:

"Your hoss will be saddled in a trice, sir, sin you're bent on leaving a good sartainty for a bad maybe. God speed ye; and may your fortune be better than your speed."

"Thank ye, thank ye."

"Sir, I've been butler in a family where both the quallity and the sarvants toasted the king ower the water seven times a week reg'lar. Them's their arms on my sign, and that's their motter, 'Vicky Vindy Fortuny.'"

Roland knew that he had received more kindness from the old man than a shilling amounted to. With that and the excitement of departure he felt an unusual expansiveness.

"'Twas that motto," he said, "that drew me to your door. My mother has wrote it in several of her books."

"I was with Squire Chance o' Hathersage. Might you belong the Chances o' Leicestershire, sir?"

"Dear heart, no! Only her name happens to be Fortuna."

"There was a Mistress Fortuny Chance," said John Every with a sudden and an odd change in his manner.

"N—no," answered Roland with a slight hesitation; then swung back into frankness. "But she quarrelled with her family long ago; she never talks of 'em."

The innkeeper's eyes were fixed upon him with a new, anxious and mournful interest; as though he was comparing the young handsome living face before him with a pallid memory. Roland perceived something of it, and his unwonted expansion suffered immediate contraction as at the touch of cold. He began to inquire about the road, and among other things asked how far it was to Ashbourne.

"Thirteen mile," answered the landlord.

"Then 'twill be only four from Loughborough."

"A good thirty, sir."

"That can't be; thirteen from seventeen is but four."

"Thirteen *and* seventeen makes no less than thirty."

"I mean the Ashbourne that is on the road to London; the road the prince left by."

John Every shook his wig and the head in it.

"We have nobbut one Ashbourne road so far as I know; and I should know." He came nearer to Roland and farther from the door. "A prince came in by't and a pretender went out by't."

The young partisan would have been angered by that balancing of prince and pretender, but his else direct thoughts were crossed by a puzzlement.

"Isn't it the road to London?"

"As well as back to Scotland? Hardly that; but it's the gainest of all roads for France."

"I don't know what you mean," said Roland, but faltered in the denial. "Speak plain."

"You say 'prince,' sir, and it suits your face and figure well. I'm of the good old persuasion myself, sir, but not so as I can't nohow be persuaded out on't, and to my mind a young gentleman who might be prince in England is pretender in Scotland and nobbut a furriner in France."

"He is never going back!" exclaimed Roland with the emphasis of an incredulous astonishment. "Never!"

"As surely as ever he comed here."

"Prithee, direct me the way to Ashbourne."

"And Scotland?"

"Ay."

"You're none going after him?"

"But I am."

"God bless thee for a brave lad! I wish I could have fun it i' my heart to go along with ye; but a man with a wife has two consciences to contend wee, and that's a sore drain on his courage. I dussn't, and I can't. I've a wife, I'm old, I've property. But take a sperritless old man's advice, sir. The prince—God save him—it'll behoove him to travel back faster e'en than he came

in. He'll not be fur from Leek by this. That means twenty mile o' bad road betwixt you and him, crowded wi' suspicious goverment men, wi' noisy turncoats and time-sarvers howling 'George is magnanimous'—damn him—wi' furious women that have lost their geese and hens, with his own draggle-tail—bless him—that stinks a mile off, and wi' the Duke's gethering army. If you follow 'em to-night you'll have a dark road and all the dirt, disturbance and danger i' your face. Now if you wait while daylight and go round the tother side o' the county by Alferton and Chesterfield—I know the road well—you'll miss the red-coats, and riding light will be at Manchester in two days, which is as soon as ever your friends with all their cumbrances can be."

The suggested route would take Roland across a strip of country well known to him, Alferton being only six miles from Kirkby. He pondered it half a minute with a darkening face, then set his teeth and said:

"He may be wanting me now. I'll go at once."

Master Every would have argued it further, but Roland cut him short with—

"Should I have slept the night here, think ye, if he had been on the road to London? As, by our Lady, I made no doubt that he would have been."

"Then, sir, I'll go and see wifey Sam don't bring your hoss out."

On his way to the stables he went aside to his wife in the kitchen, drew her apart and spoke seriously to her. But as their conversation was evidently meant to be private, we shall preserve our delicacy and only record Mistress Every's last loud words.

"Tell Sam he shall have a mug of strong beer with a toast, nutmeg and sugar in't, as he best likes it."

After Roland had waited five impatient minutes the landlord came back to him with an expression on his face of grief sympathetic.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but th' hostler tells me your nag's so lame it ud be downraight cruelty to travel further to-night."

"Lame? He was right enough when I brought him in."

"Sam says he was suspeckful of the near fore-leg at the first, and now he's sure on't. I'll send him up to ye, sir, if you like, but I should advise ye to see the hoss for yourself. I never knowed but one hostler who never telled a lie. He was dumb."

"'Tis not this one?"

"Lord love ye, no, sir; Sam's tongue's more than usual loose-hung. It's none tied to him, nor him to it. I belave it floats in his mouth like a cork atop o' what he puts into't."

Having encouraged his guest to rely upon his own fallibility the landlord saw him down the passage into the yard. There they could hear rather than see the horses being taken out of a coach.

"The Lunnon coach, sir," said the landlord, "just comed in; and except one disappointed-looking would-be sort o' person i' the basket ne'er a passenger by't, inside or out."

"How is that?" asked Roland.

"Unsattled weather, sir, and bad roads; noat surprising nayther."

At the landlord's call a stable-boy came, and with a horn-lantern conducted Roland across the unpaved yard between a line of pigsties and a rotting manure heap. The boy seemed inclined to linger by the pigs. He held the lantern so as to light up a huge sleeping sow.

"Shay's a socker, bain't she?" said he. "I wish I'd a bit of her crackling atween my teeth now. My eye, what a belly! I wish mine were hafe as big. There's no stint here o' noat; but a man canna eat to bust hissen. Shay canna for that matter. See what a dollup o' good swill shay's letten be. There *has* bin some brucken victuals sin them petticut-men coomed. I reckon shay wishes they'd stopped a twelvemonth."

Roland had but a Friday interest in swine's flesh.

"Show me the stall my horse is in," said he.

Sam the hostler was there with his tongue loose, float-

ing probably in strong beer qualified with toast, nutmeg and sugar. He glibly insisted that the animal was suffering from a strained fetlock. Sorrel certainly walked lame. Roland handled and examined him as well as he could by the dim light of the horn lantern unsteadily held by Sam. He could not assure himself that there was any heat or swelling at the joint mentioned, but the light was bad, he had little skill in horse ailments and his attention was preoccupied by Sam's verbiage. However the horse not being his own but lent, and lent not to him but the cause, he could not do otherwise than defer his setting off until the morrow. Perhaps it would have been as well if he had looked between the animal's hoof and shoe. Sam, fluent prophet, promised by means of diligent fomentation to have the nag fit and well by seven in the morning, and Roland, half satisfied, returned to his private room. John Every came up just after him with a foaming tankard in his hand.

"A make-up of wife's mother, sir, for which raison we call it mother-in-law. She's dead, gone to heaven I hope, but she'll take it for a compliment if she hears me say, and say true, that she left the better part of herself behind."

He put the tankard on the side of the table nearest to the fire. He set it by a chair which the drawer had just brought in, a chair with cushioned seat, wide hospitable arms and complaisant back.

"Don't lave a drop o' mother-in-law at bottom, sir. The latter end on her is better than the beginning; which isn't allus the way with ayther men or drinks having much more promisify names."

What superiority that concoction had over purl, punch or black-strap I know not. Possibly it possessed some of the wheedling qualities of its inventress. As she was great at fostering a young man's hesitant liking for a pair of bright eyes and a hospitable table, until it grew into a serious intention of matrimony, so her compound would seem to have given encouragement where it was needed. Anyhow the tankard was empty half an hour

later, and Roland had persuaded himself and was trying to persuade John Every, allowing nothing for baiting, accidents, bad roads and weather, that he could reach Macclesfield if not Manchester in one day of hard riding.

With his permission Mistress Every came up to pay her respects, a marked civility from that independent woman. She was a buxom person, almost as heavy again in the scales as her husband, and evidently gifted with a ready tongue, a searching eye and an inquiring mind. She hoped that the young gentleman had dined to his satisfaction, asked him how old he was, complained of the shortage in provisions through the troubles, and expressed surprise that his mother allowed him to range the country in such unsettled times. But doubtless she had a many sons besides him.

"No," answered he with a twinge of remorse, "now I have gone, all she has is gone."

"Good lackaday, sir," quoth she, "a lady didn't ought to be left so lonesome, poor thing! 'Tis not raight."

"She has Press, her maid."

"And her good gentleman too, I should hope."

Quick as was her return that side-glance at her John had been got in between. But Roland did not answer, and her subsequent questioning extracted no further information from him. Nevertheless she took her leave with a smile and a curtsy and a promise of supper; a very good sort of woman with quite eight stones the advantage of her husband. The supper she served him up was even better than her promise. If their chance customers usually fared as well it was a house of a noble hospitality. John waited on him, to the utter neglect I should say of his other guests, and when he showed him to his bedroom offered his service as valet; which however Roland declined.

"I hope I hain't been troublesome to ye, sir," said John with an odd quaver of the voice.

"Certainly not," answered Roland lightly. "I take your attentions as very kindly meant and done."

"Thank ye, sir. Good-night, sir. God bless ye, sir."

## CHAPTER XIII

### CAIN AND ABEL

As the hostler had promised, the gelding had punctually recovered by seven o'clock next morning, and Roland after an excellent solid breakfast was able to set off at daybreak. The reckoning was nothing like as much as he had expected. He thought to himself that at that rate his mother's guineas would carry him far. He was followed out by John Every, and their hearty farewells were spoken in the open air; but the last thing he said in the house was this:

• "Where did he lie?"

"At Exeter House in Full Street," answered his host. "'Tis but crossing the market-place and—— But I'll send the boot-catcher to show you there."

"Quite unnecessary," said Roland, who perhaps detected a faltering in the offer.

"Sir, I'm mean-sperrited enough to be glad as you're pleased to think so. As a man gets older and richer he seems to have a many tyrants ower him, and what's worse gets to be proud on 'em." Every gave the necessary directions and added, "It's a mighty fine red-brick house set aback from the road. But you'll know it best by its winders. The mob broke 'em; after he'd gone of course."

Last of all, when Roland had foot in stirrup, John said to him from the pavement:

"When you see madam your mother again, sir, which I hope may be soon, pray give her my duty, John Every's humble duty, o' the Fortune Inn. For the sake of her name being up on my sign."

Roland rode across the market-place into Full Street



and easily found Exeter House, not only by its handsome red frontage but also by its broken windows. There were already people about in the twilight, though they seemed to have nothing more pressing to do than watch his movements. Nevertheless as he went by at a walk he bared his head and saluted the temporary abode of royalty. A strapping wench who was passing, a buxom roguish twenty-year-old, openly tossed him a kiss, chapped hand to cherry mouth. He blushed in handsome acknowledgment of the compliment, then broke into a quick trot, more in fear of her admiration than the bystanders' hostility.

After he had crossed the bridge he turned northwards up the river valley, at that season a swampy hollow hedged about by green hills. It was a cloudy morning with a howling west wind. For the first mile, to Little Chester, the going was only bad; for the next two or so, as far as Little Eaton, was not quite intolerable, but after that under the operation of the late heavy snow and rain and the assiduous neglect of the waywardens the track had become such a composition of mire, loose stones, ruts and pitfalls as would disgrace the name of road. Still he pushed on as fast as he might and his nag seemed as willing as ever. But riding depends on the rider as much as the horse; Roland's spirits had not the vivacity of yestermorn. Then he would because he must, now he must because he would; then he was driven, now he drove himself. With the best intention in the world (and the worst roads be it remembered) it was half-past ten o'clock when he rode up into Ripley.

The hounds were out in the neighbourhood, and as he rode down to Butterley they crossed the road before him in full cry. Sorrel in his eagerness to follow them sprang without warning straight at a roadside gate. His rider's inconsiderate hand tried to restrain him even while he leapt. Thus checked he jumped short, rapped the top rail with his fore-legs and fell heavily. Roland went head over heels and knocked all the powder out of his wig, but immediately rose again, much shaken,

little hurt; the horse was lamed in the near fore-leg, the injury doubtless from which he had suffered anticipatorily the night before. He led him back to Ripley to a good inn which he had noticed in passing. In its stables he took counsel with landlord and hostler, who were of one opinion, that the animal would not be fit for the road again under a fortnight. He saw that it got such relief as hot water and bandages could afford, then dined, pondering the while his situation, again reduced as he was to his two legs with an unnegotiable draft on him and but a very few guineas in gold. Quite at haphazard as it seemed he bethought him of Bob Radage's neglected commission. Dinner over he asked the landlord on what terms he would keep the horse until he was in condition to travel and then send him to Annesley. The landlord was one of those who take more interest in the advice they give than anything they have to sell. As soon as Mr. Chaworth of Annesley was mentioned he said:

"I know that young gentleman; he sometimes comes through on a visit to his uncle, Squire Poole of Heage. To tell the truth I owned<sup>1</sup> the nag as soon as ivver I seed him, but I didn't say noat because a gentleman gen'rally ud sooner hae it doubted as his wife's hisn than his hoss. Now Heage een't hardly more than two mile from here. If I was you, sir, I'd let Joe take the hoss there to the hall. Whether his honour's at home or no, I'll warrant they'll keep him gladly at no cost to nobody while he's all raight again."

Roland gladly accepted a proposal so disinterested. He was told it was barely four miles to Alfretton. Footing it even in riding-boots he could easily reach home by nightfall. Unless Jude Mikin had blabbed, probably his absence would not have become known in the village. He could direct the fulfilment of his implicit promise to Bob, give his mother certain news of the turn of events, perhaps get his draft cashed locally, if necessary equip himself for a journey afoot, at any rate pass the night under the same roof with her.

<sup>1</sup> Recognized.

He so timed his departure that it was an hour short of sunset when he passed through Alfreton, but the day was so much obscured by a heavy cloud which had been slowly heaping itself up in the north-west, that it was already twilight. He knew that it would be night before he reached a part where he was well known. As far as he might he followed the Mansfield road by Norman-ton's breezy common, then turned off and made his own way down towards Pinxton green. The howling wind blew more and more boisterously; the black westerly cloud had been growing and growing. The premature dusk was scarcely qualified by the faint shine of the moon, which now in its second quarter was ascending the clear eastern half of the sky.

At length that mass of cloud was noticeably in movement, in commotion; a rift in it let through the sun's glare. It filled the air with an ensanguined obscurity. Roland looked round, but the broken cloud was already rejoining, the splendour was being dispossessed. In a minute that crimson trouble in the air had become but a lurid all-pervading threat. A man ploughing on the hillside with two oxen and a horse stopped him and said:

"Heerd oat o' them wild French naked savages? We reckon they'll be i' London by this, massacreing raight and left, man, woman and child."

"I doubt they're not so forward as that," answered Roland, and hastened on.

Langton Hall was then in front of him; but swerving to the right he went straight to the Erewash, gathered himself to jump the swollen stream from a very soft starting-place, was an inch or two short of landing and went in up to the middle. As he continued along the higher ground of the left bank he saw the lights of the hall twinkle through the leafless trees, twinkle and disappear and twinkle again. The clouds had come down from their mustering on the Derbyshire hilltops, and were advancing up the valley in one dark low unbroken line. Pinxton behind him was blotted out, high-seated

Kirkby was blotted out; all at once the moon lost her place in the sky.

By then he was within a mile and a half of home. He left skirting the deviating Erewash before he reached the mill, gave as wide an avoidance as he could to the two or three homesteads of Kirkby Woodhouse, and hastened up alongside a tiny counterpart of the Grives, the dingle which is scantily watered by the Mapple wells. A tall man came up out of it, invisible until he was a score paces off.

"Ethan!" he cried in a harsh voice. "Ethan!"

"I'm not Ethan," answered Roland.

"Where has that hell-hound's breed took hissen?" said the man angrily. "I want his help." Just then it thundered. "Hark at God's voice. There's a storm a-coming on, and we shall be blowed to hell afore me and the women can make the tents fast."

"It looks mighty storm-like," said Roland. "The wind's resting for a rush."

The man made no answer, but turning strode down the bank again and in a second or two was part of the general darkness. The darkness had eaten up all the earth and two-thirds of the sky. The wind, as Roland said, had suddenly fallen light; there was a threatening stillness. He hastened on, but before he had covered more than half a mile he felt the air stir again, and with no more warning than that it blew a furious gale more on his back than on his left cheek. It was black night both above and below. But as soon as the darkness was complete it was pierced by a flash of lightning. The crash of thunder was immediate, and promptly on that signal came a storm of hail and snow. Again and again it lightened, and at each flash the downpour increased.

Soon he hit the road; of which he was aware by tread and no whit by sight. He was near the Whin-shaw as he judged and about a furlong above the Nook. Turning down the road he brought his right cheek to the blast; the frozen pellets stung his skin. Yet again it lightened, and by the blue light he saw in front of him,

perhaps a dozen yards off, in the air without visible limbs or body, the face of Marrott the keeper, a ghastly apparition gone as soon as seen. But he heard Marrott's loud rough voice in a momentary lull :

"What are yer agate on now, Roly Surety? And who's that man just behint yer with a knife in's hand?"

Roland looked behind, but the night filled his eyes, the thunder his ears. He did not wait to be questioned again; taken between two fears he dashed aside to the left and floundered blindly through the wet bracken, gorse and ling that bordered the road. Tripped by unearthed roots and trailing branches, pricked by spines and drenched with moisture, on he plunged, until the ground began to descend quickly. He was in one of the many gullies which furrow that hillside. During a short lull in the storm he stood and listened, but heard nothing distinguishable save the natural rumblings, hissings, mutterings and murmurs, that whether low as a whisper or loud as a roar still filled the air to the exclusion of all other sounds. He walked on more slowly down the rocky trough of the gully and began to consider his position, determine his conduct.

It would evidently be unsafe for him to carry out his former intention of passing the night at home. Should he take shelter in the neighbourhood for a few hours, snatch a midnight interview with his mother and then go on his way afoot? Or should he not at once quit that dangerous spot? Would not his sudden return be more of a terror than a comfort to his mother? His judgment was all for departing, his scheming all for remaining. For the present he was content to seek shelter awhile in Robin Hood's cave, a spacious retreat hollowed out of the rocky hillside just under the Nook. The gale had become much less violent but snow or sleet still fell heavily. He passed out of the gully into the valley below. He turned to the right and with the storm in his face made straight along the level for the cave. He had not gone far, he was crossing the mouth of the gully next to that which he had just left, when he heard on his right a loud expostulatory voice :

"What's that for? Lemme see yer! Face me like a man!"

It was so near that for the moment he took it as addressed to himself; but while he hesitated to answer there followed a louder cry, inarticulate, single, such an "Oh!" of surprise, pain, anger, terror, rebellion as is forced from lips which being greatly in need of speech are past it.

He ran towards the voice. He strained his eyes but could see nothing. When he had run as he thought a sufficient distance he stood and strained his ears, but could hear nothing save the pant of the dying storm. He waded through the snow-heavy bracken more deliberately, but with the aimless motions of a man groping fearfully in the dark for he knows not what. Suddenly the storm was laid; the clouds were still entire, but an unrevealing half-light or no-light, more terrible than mere darkness, began to glimmer among the snow. He stopped again and cried:

"What is the matter?" And again, "Is anybody here?"

Thereupon he heard a sort of laugh only a few yards off, or rather a low hysterical snigger suppressed before well uttered.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!"

So saying, with his hair all a-bristle, he drew his sword and sprang towards the sound, but stumbled over a something that lay in the way. He stopped; his hands had to do abominable duty for his eyes. Their cursory examination made out a heap of clothes, a man's clothes, also a man's hand, quite warm, but which being lifted and let go fell back among the bracken. He spoke towards what should have been a man's head and ears.

"What ails you? Who are you?"

A sound came from what he spoke towards, a gasp, a harsh gurgle; which he could fancy was an answering voice or at least a groan by way of appeal. He made haste to act while the comfort of it lasted. He dropped

the sword and tried to raise that inert something to a sitting posture, but it fell back at once. It was undoubtedly a man; there was a grey uncertain snow-like glimmer where the face would be; a man of great size and weight. He shrank from considering what man it was—or had been. He knelt by it and again made it sit up. He set his teeth and with repeated, redoubled exertions, which strained his every muscle and made the sweat ooze out all over his body, he managed to get its head and shoulders over his own right shoulder. As he did so there came from it again a sound, a gasp, the hoarse passage of breath or perhaps mere air. Then with one quick, almost convulsive effort he rose to his feet and straightened himself up. He felt a warm wetness on his right cheek.

Thus laden he strode heavily through the encumbering ling and bracken up the gully, taking the nearest if not the easiest way to the Nook. The clouds had broken up, and now they suddenly let the moonshine through. An unrecognizable uncouth monstrous shadow glided before him along the snow; he set his foot upon it every step he took. The silence and the dead weight of what he carried troubled him. The roughness of the ground gave him many a jolt and stumble. His knees began to give way, his grasp to relax, his breath to come in pants. He was brought to a stand long before he reached the head of the gully. He stood and perforce let his burden slip through his arms. Slowly before his vision under the ghastly illumination of the moon passed one by one a gaping distorted mouth, staring inanimate eyes and a bloody pate horribly gashed; each having a dreadful resembling unlikeness to Marrott the keeper's. The tension of his muscles was suddenly loosed, the weight fell from him to the ground, he fled homewards pursued by his own terror.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A KNOCK IN THE DARK

BRIDGET the then maid at the Nook was a thick-set wench with a pronounced waddle, a gait fruitful of collisions with furniture and destruction of crockery. She had a great fat blowzy unexpressive face and a voice like a sparrow's, a harsh chirp. She kept Master Roland's shoes well oiled and drudged for him generally with never a word of thanks. He would not have known her away from the house, any more than one of the kitchen chairs; and she was quite content that it should be so. Nothing in an ordinary way put her out but Friday's fish. She couldn't abide the smell on't. It sempt to her to smell o' popery.

"And what is popery, thou slut?" Press once said.

"I dunno raightly."

"That I'll go bond for. But what is't wrongly, stock?"

"'Tis wooden shoes and warming-pans and stinking fish and—and substitution."

Thus it would appear that she was not altogether devoid of sensibility, and when Roland tried the back door she knew by the touch that it was not her brother Jude; he who had been engaged to sleep in the house during Roland's absence.

Roland had stood awhile outside to take breath and smooth away some of the horror from his face. He knew well enough that the prudent course would have been to make a night flight of it; but his greatest fear just then was of the night—and what it covered, his greatest need to see a living face. So when he had stood a little while he put hand to the door, but found it bolted. At his



knock Press bade Bridget open ; but the wench's nerves had been shaken by that preliminary trial of the door. She went no nearer than the middle of the floor, and thence asked in a timid squeak inaudible without :

"Who's theer ?"

"Open the door straight," said Press peremptorily.

"I dussn't."

"Why not, slut ?"

"I'm scarred at a knock i' th' dark."

Press scornfully took up the kitchen rushlight in its iron stick, swept the wench from the middle of the room, undid the bolt and opened the door herself. Roland was for stepping in. The candle, held in her left hand, cast its light on his right cheek. She started ; she stayed his entrance with her other hand ; her eyes darted exclamations at him but her speech was commonplace.

"Stop outside the door, sir, till I've batted the snow off your coat."

If her hand had been weaker than it was, her face would have stopped him. She set down the candle, took a round towel from its wooden jack on the door and went over the threshold to him.

"Sure 'tis not your own ?" she whispered.

"What ?"

She dabbed his cheek with the towel and held it so that enough light fell on it to show him a bloody stain. He shuddered and whispered back :

"I wish it were."

"Has there been battling ?"

"Not to my knowledge."

She wiped the cheek first with the dry towel, then taking a handful of half-melted snow wetted it and rubbed it quite clean before she let him in. He changed his coat for that which had been worn by him on Thursday and was still hanging in the kitchen. The towel Press hid under her apron, and as she followed him to the parlour threw it into a closet under the stairs. Fortuna started up on her son's entrance. At once she cried out, and her face was pale—

"They are after you! Where shall we hide him, Edith?"

"Nay, mother," said he, "I'm in no manner of danger; but the night's wild and I'm glad to be at home."

The parrot woke up, put her other claw down on the perch, stretched her neck and screamed:

"Buss me, dear boy! Buss my pretty mouth!"

Fortuna put her arms round her son and kissed him on his cheek, the right cheek.

"Your cheek is cold and damp, child," she said.

Again he shuddered, but said with a show of self-possession:

"It is the snow."

"Why did you shudder?"

"It is the cold."

"Come to the fire, dear."

He took more comfort just then from her human voice, from the living warmth of her flesh, the living outlook of her eyes than from what was personal to himself, the fond inquiry, the maternal pressure, the affectionate scrutiny. The parrot sprang to the side of her cage, clutched the wires, fluttered her wings and clamoured for attention. He went and quietened her by stroking her poll and letting her nibble gently at his finger.

"Why have you come back so soon, child?" said Fortuna.

"To see you, mother."

"But—the prince?"

"He had left Derby."

"Then why did you not follow him?"

"I am following him; in a way."

"This way? To London?"

"No, mother, to Scotland."

"To Scotland? Scotland? Then——"

"Yes, he has given everything up, except his life."

"But he has never considered his life. I don't understand."

She seemed to bend under the shock; she found it

necessary to sit. Roland left the parrot, placed a chair for her and stood over her. Presently she said :

"He has suffered a reverse?"

"No, mother, only a retreat."

"A retreat!"

She seemed to be pondering the word. In a little while with a desolate attempt at self-consolation she said :

"But I must not pretend to understand strategy."

She looked up again.

"Where is your hat, child?"

It was easier for her to ask to see the hat than to inquire directly how he had worn the cockade, inside or out. Before he had put his questioning hand to his head he knew, in a way remembered, though he had not noticed it at the time, that he had lost his hat when the dead man slipped through his arms. Again the slow procession of gaping mouth, sightless eyes, battered skull passed before him.

"Something dreadful has happened the prince!" she exclaimed.

"No, for aught I know he is well and safe."

"Then to yourself!"

"No, mother." He managed to add, "I must have lost it in the storm."

"Gone back! After so much doing and so much more promising! You hain't yet told me—— But you are wet; you need to change. Press, bring a candle for——"

But Press had already left the room. Roland opened the door, perhaps to fetch the candle himself, but went no further.

"Why do you stand and listen, child?" said his mother.

"I thought I heard——"

"Heard?" He did not say. "What is it, child?"

The sight of his mother's fear, face to face, made his own seem farther off and less. He shut the door again.

"I thought that—the storm was coming on afresh."

He took her hand and led her back to the fire.

Press had gone out of the room on a sudden thought.

It was about the time for Mikin's Jude to come, Bridget's brother. Indeed when she entered the kitchen he was already on one side of the yet unopened door and his sister on the other. But while unbolting Bridget had had time to squeak through the keyhole:

"Mester Roland's coomed back! With his face all ower blood!"

Not knowing which the lady's maid had immediately come between, and dismissed him from the doorstep with a shilling and "Come again to-morrow; madam don't need you to-night."

Soon Roland was sitting in dry clothes and home comfort to a supper of Press's purveying. Press went in and out, fetched and took, carved the capon, served the custard and stirred the fire to a blaze. The parrot again had her head under her wing. Fortuna sat beside her son, so near that when it was not enough to see him she could secretly lay her hand on his sleeve or the skirt of his coat. But while he ate with a young man's appetite, reflected her smile and answered or seemed to answer her questions, and while he put his hands towards the fire's warmth and dipped his nose deeper and deeper into his silver tankard, it was always in his thought that he must go away before night was separable from morning, and must fetch his hat and sword from beside that gaping corpse. And his mother? While she seemed to be accepting his answers and exciting his smile, she knew his smiles were but a cover, his communications but a withholding. Never mind; it was much to have her son so unexpectedly by the hearth again; she would be satisfied for the present with a half-satisfaction; on the morrow—but the morrow should take care of itself.

The meal was over and they were talking of his purposed route.

"Then you go by Chesterfield, child?" she said. "And 'tis like you'll pass through Ashover."

"Ashover?"

His fancy seized on the trivial half-resemblance to Ashbourne and stamped it indelibly on his memory.

"If you should, take note of it and send me word——"

"Of what?"

"What sort of a place it is; and—what sort of people live there."

Press, seated at a proper distance on the other side of the table, was dividing herself between due attention to her needlework and a discreet scrutiny of her mistress's and young master's demeanour. She spoke at haphazard in her haste.

"Anyhow, ma'am, we shan't need to be afeared of robbery nor ghostery to-night."

Fortuna shivered visibly; then brightening into an unusual anger exclaimed:

"Oh lord, Press, don't talk so like a vapourish fool! As if *you* had nerves."

"Anyhow it's time you had your sack-posset, ma'am," said Press.

But before she had gone to see after it Fortuna's gaze returned to her son; she forced herself into a smile, and to provoke him to one said gaily:

"I have had another unexpected visitor this night. Sure if they come so thick I must have a day. Who do you think?"

"I can't think."

"The last man in your thoughts."

"I'm no guesser."

"That keeper what's-his-name—Adam Marriott. What have you seen, child? Why do you change?"

Seen? He had seen it again, just under his eyes, that pageant of death; yawning mouth, visionless balls, bloody crown. But his mother's great fear compelled him to have none.

"I seem to feel the outside cold still, mother."

"Press shall put some more coal on."

"Why did he visit you, mother?"

"Now you *must* laugh. He came—to convert me from popery and Jacobitism; only that."

He courageously tried at a laugh, but only arrived at a grimace.

"'Tis so—so horrible!" he stammered.

"Rather say 'tis so amusing. The absurdity of it, the assurance of it, the enormity of it tickled me. With due pains it shall you. But at bottom he is a very honest fellow and we parted very good friends. 'You're too dainty a bite, ma'am,' he said, 'for the devil's mouth. I've good hopes you'll dodge it after all. I shall pray to-night as your end may be better nor your beginning. Nay, life's an unsure thing; there's a storm a-coming up; a thunderstone might strike you down in your sins; I'll pray for you as soon as I get away by myself.' Aren't you laughing now? Still serious? Well, perhaps seriousness is the fitter mood. And what do you think? I had to promise to pray for him! A fine confusion of prayers that in heavenly ears! the lumpish heretic's and the vain worldly woman's!" Fortuna laughed indeed, and yet in her laughter there was an underquality more proper to tears. "So now we are very good friends, he and I; and I will that you also be very good friends with him, and shake hands at your next meeting. I will it, I, Fortuna."

"*Victrix vel vindex.*"

He could not help the exclamation; he could and did help the sob that belonged to it; or all but that slight convulsive inbreath, which to a nice ear—a mother's for instance—told of a something suppressed.

"What is it, child?" she said, and took his hand.

"'Tis all so terrible!"

"What? The retreat?"

"They called it a flight at Derby."

"He shall come back, child; and you with him. It must be so. Consider how miraculously he has hitherto been aided and defended. What a guard of saints and angels he must have merited to have come so far! And shall it be in vain, dear? It would be derogatory of those blessed and powerful ministrants to think so. He shall return, and you with him."

So the persuasion of love persuaded him to be comforted when that of reason would have failed.

Press retired, but mother and son sat talking far into the night. He did not forget John Every's quaint message. She made no answer in words; and her face happening to be turned away just then he could not take his answer from it. He was not surprised; there was so much that was more important to tell and to answer. And he told her much; but the broken sequences of his itinerary favouring reservation he did not tell her that he had not gone round by Nottingham to cash her note. They talked, but each preoccupied with something other than their talk—she watching his face, he listening for the door.

He was to set out afoot long before daybreak. All preparations made, everything said—or was it nothing said?—he went to bed at last, but only for his mother's sake. He did not expect to sleep, did not mean to sleep, was resolved not to sleep. He was more afraid of what he might see in his sleep than of anything he could see awake. He fell asleep as soon as he put head to pillow; it was the mother who waked.

## CHAPTER XV

### SATURDAY NIGHT

It was Saturday night and the buzz about the invading army's retreat was at its height, so there was a full company and a thirsty at the "Admiral Anson," particularly in the kitchen. There among many others were Smallage the constable and Ted Crabb, Mark Gadley the younger of the charcoal-burners, Tom Warmly, Joe Kipping, All-fours and Haxby the blacksmith, notable chiefly for a general heaviness and snuffiness; Loony too, so nicknamed because two or three cans turned his everyday oddness into sheer lunacy. Sitch was there, the lime-burner, a mountain of a man with hardly any voice, Todd the pinder, a mere sponge, and Spyvee, sexton, dog-whipper and sluggard-waker to the parish, commonly called the bobber from the long rod with a bob at the end wherewith he performed his office upon sleepers in church. In a corner at a small table, whereon stood the only candle in the room, sat Mr. Knill the curate in his cassock but with a dirty old nightcap on awry instead of wig. The weaver and parish clerk in one skin, the exciseman and a barber-surgeon from Mansfield in two sat with him, smoking and quarrelling over a game of teetotum. These four were somewhat apart from the general conversation, which turned upon such parochial topics as the late harvest, Master Toon's five-legged calf and the Methodists. Ted Crabb was disposed to be severe on the churchwarden for his share in getting the stockinger pressed for a soldier and Marrott dismissed from his keepership.

"It warn't Mester Huff's fault," said Spyvee, "it were his conscience; it's that stret."



"Raight, bobber," said Haxby heavily; "a man can't goo again his conscience."

"Can't he?" said Crabb. "I'd do't on the spot for hafe a can."

"Yo wouldn't, Ted," said All-fours; "for yo hain't non to do't wee."

"Nay, nay, nay! coom, coom!" said Spyvee. "Iv'ry man hes a conscience o' some sort."

"The devil hain't, so theer!" said Warmly.

"But he's non a man, is he?" whispered Sitch.

"If yo say he's a woman," said Warmly, "I'll up and tell your Peg."

"Mightn't he be nayther man nor woman?" said Smallage.

"Not and do all the mischief he gets called for," said Crabb.

"It seems to me just even betting," said Joe Kipping.

"What d'yo say, Mester Knill?" asked the blacksmith.

The curate, appealed to by many voices, did not answer until the exciseman twitched him by his sleeve to bespeak his attention.

"Damn all your consciences," he said, "his and yours; you're balking me of my spin."

But having made his spin and sworn at the badness of it he added:

"Why this prating about conscience of a Saturday night, men? Couldn't ye wait decently till to-morrow? I know where you are; 'tis this growing cant of the Methodists. They are the most disturbing dogs in the nation."

But the barber-surgeon span, and span so high that the curate stopped denouncing conscience to call up hell against the teetotum.

"'Twere a good un anyhow," quoth Warmly, "what the Duke o' Kingston said when the parson wanted him to stop Leg-it's pension as he gies him."

"I nivver heerd o' that," said the charcoal-burner.

"Says the duke to the parson, 'Wheer's he took wi' this 'ere Methodishness? In's head or lights or wheer?' Says the parson to the duke very solemn like, 'Your grace, he's gotten it bad both in's head an' heart.' 'Then coom to me again,' says the duke, 'when it's gone lower, I gied the pension to his legs.'"

"Some miscalls dukes sore," said Loony; "I don't when I've oat better to do."

But whatever the topic for the time being the talk was sure to come round again, ever with increased beeriness, to the Young Pretender's surprising advance and more surprising retreat, to exaggerations of his Highlanders' spoliation and mutual congratulations upon the narrow escape of Kirkby and the rest of England. And whenever the talk did so recur somebody was sure to bring in Roland Surety's name.

The most considerable break in that conversational cycle was when Ethan the Gipsy entered.

"I believe, neebours," said Warmly, lazily stretching his legs out towards the fire, "I believe the last time the Gipsy were mentioned here summat were said about the millpond an' all."

Before anybody had made his deliberate reply Ethan had taken his fiddle from his pocket and struck up "Turn again, Whittington." After that he played "My lodging is on the cold ground" with long-drawn pathos; then put his fiddle aside and called for a pot of ale.

"Yo're i' th' raigh't, Gipsy," said All-fours, as though Ethan had spoken. "Yo play a good stick; we couldn't afford to put yer out the way for a trifle o' pound-breach. Nay, oddzooks, not for oat less nor ronk murder."

A hum of general applause followed the sentiment. Indeed everybody was so comfortable where he was that Ethan, as he well saw, had never been in any sort of danger. Nevertheless it was noticeable that contrary to wont he drank much and fiddled little.

At ten o'clock scarcely anybody had gone home to bed but Sitch, fetched away as usual by his wife. At ten o'clock I think they were re-discussing how Lord Robert

Sutton went to Worksop Manor for arms, and through the Duchess's blarney got nothing but a dinner. In the midst of which Spyvee said—perhaps he heard the wind howling in the wide chimney—he said, as he may have said a dozen times before :

"I warrant Roly Surety'd gie a good summat for to be back by's warm fireside."

Said Haxby, not of course for the first nor yet the third time, "He wain't coom back, nivver no more."

"Unless wee a helter round his neck," said the charcoal-burner.

"Yo don't know noat about it," said the constable contemptuously.

"Ne'er mind, Mark," said Ted Crabb, "yo'll know more."

"He'll non be seen wi' no helter here," continued Samson. "It's atop o' Gallers Hill at Nottingham wheer that'll coom in."

"If he hes the luck," said All-fours.

"The Lord presarve me from sich a high calling!" said Spyvee.

"Nay," said Crabb, "he'll non mucky his finger-ends wi' a stinking little job like that'n; yo mun look after your bit of a weazand yoursen, bobber."

"I'll lay a shilling to any man's groat," said Joe Kipping, "as the bobber comes i' th' end to be hanged."

"Nay, nay," said Warmly, "yo can't expect nobody to tek up no sich risky wager as that'n. I'd as soon hull money into the South Sea."

"Neebours, neebours!" protested Spyvee all pale, "it's not jonnock to mix and meddle thus wi' a man's private consarns."

"Private?" said Crabb. "Your hanging, man, ull be the publickest thing as ivver yo'll hae a hand in—or rayther a neck in. Unless mebbe yo're thinking o' living atop o' your church steeple, stark nak'd."

"Neebours, neebours!" said Spyvee. "If his reverence heerd o' this he'd nivver overget it."

"He'd be i' th' raight on't," said Crabb. "He'd

judge thy mucky 'haviour by the cleanness of his own bands."

"Ne'er mind, man," said Tom Warmly, "don't tek it so to heart. Sich on's as can't get to thy hanging shall be theer to do homage to thy chaining up."

Ethan set down his pot, lifted his head and straightened his back; then took his fiddle and drew from it so like a mimicry of a rusty reluctant cartwheel's simultaneous rumble, growl and squeal, that everybody who was still master of his looking looked at him.

"That's the song o' the cart," quoth he with a strange leer. "If it dear sweet voice is a teeny weeny bit out o' tune, 'tis for want of oil, not practice. And now, my pretty gentlemen, the dance of the gallows-tree."

Straight he dashed off into a weird hopperty skipperty strain, cattishly nimble, fiendishly merry, grotesquely minor; wherein if one marked the eerie convulsive dance rhythm, presto by starts, wildly irregular, at the same time one felt the low drawl of an interwoven wail. But by degrees, loose uncertain degrees subject to recurrences, the dance lost its devilish briskness, fell to intermission, while the wail persisted, and though ever at the same subdued pitch seemed to grow until it filled the ear. At length the dance was extenuated to an occasional quiver; at last it died off in a short spasm. Then the wail too ended abruptly in a thin unearthly altissimo.

There was no applause. It is inconceivable that any one of that clownish audience could consciously follow the music's drift, but they were all impressed somehow, vaguely disturbed. They stirred uneasily on their seats, looked doubtfully round at one another. The teetotum players forwent their wrangle over the last spin. Perhaps All-fours voiced the general feeling when he asked:

"Yourn, Bos'ell,<sup>1</sup> or hisn?" pointing to the bobber. "Or one o' huz tothers?"

"You'll know, all on ye," answered the Gipsy, "by this time to-morrow."

<sup>1</sup> Gipsy.

His eyes, set in a ghastly green pallor, glittered with a distempered brilliance. Like and unlike was Loony's face, dusky purple with wild staring eyes, as Loony pushed it within a span of the bobber's nose and said with a hoarse grim intensity:

"Is there more call, think yer, for bobbers in heaven or in hell? It's no good a man gooin' wheer there's no use for 's trade."

The bobber hitched back on the form and answered nervously:

"I dunno, Loony; I nivver made that much inquiry." He looked at the cuckoo clock on the wall and rose. "But it's later nor I tho't. Good-night, neebours."

He slipped out before he could be answered, leaving a can half full. Loony snatched it up before All-fours could get his hand anywhere near. One crony jogged another with his elbow. It was well understood that Loony preserved a certain drowthy sanity in his wildest moments. But Crabb had followed Spyvee to the door to fire off a parting quirk at his back.

"Yo'd best try hell, bobber; there's noat like a good coal fire for to mek a man sleepy."

From the door he watched the bobber stagger off with the help of a steadying hand on the house wall; but the moonlight was not strong enough to show whether the jest had taken effect on the back. He was still on the step—the cold air felt good to his hot forehead—when Leg-it came by.

"Seed oat of Abel to-night?" said Leg-it.

"Ay," answered Ted, "he's inside; hafe happy and hafe Methody. But th' happy's gettin' the best o' th' Methody fast."

Three or four men who had just turned out of the "Blue Boy" heard the answer, and followed Leg-it and Crabb in for the fun of seeing Marrott drunk again and to drink a parting can over it. Loud was the laughter and the shouts of welcome when the Methodist showed himself at the kitchen door. He turned sternly to Crabb, who was behind him, saying:

"Yo'd do better to murder a man, Ted Crabb, nor kill his good name."

"That be damned," said Ted. "A man's good name don't lay on the breath o' such uns as me or any o' these 'ere swine as I keep company wee."

Leg-it turned again to the company.

"Friends," said he—

"Hae a sup o' this," quoth Tom Warmly.

"Thankee, Tom, 'twain't mix wi' the dram I've just partaken on."

"Sperrits?"

"Ay, th' Holy Sperrit o' God." The unexpectedness of the answer made him silence for a little while. "Has any on yer seed Abel Marrott? He'd coomed home from sticking on the common and he felt a sudden call to goo and see Mistress Surety at the Nook. 'Twere just afore the storm begun. He'd heerd as her son were gone off and wished to gie her a bit o' faithful warning. Now his missis is some anxious——"

A common laughter broke the sentence.

"What?" said Warmly. "She's afeard he's gone on the rampage again?"

"'Twain't be long fust," said All-fours.

"He's non the man," said Crabb, "to be content long wi' psalms and sarmons."

"Nay, it's becos o' the storm and bein' as he promised me and a few friends to meet uz in prayer at seven o'clock time."

"Fetch him back wi' yer prayers," said Crabb, "an' save yersen all this leg business."

"Yo've spoke a true word," cried Leg-it, and fell on his knees in the midst of them.

"Stop!" said Loony. "There's summat wrong wi' me. Could yer put a word in tō rightle me?"

"There's no bounds to the power o' prayer," said Leg-it.

"I'll gie it a trial," said Loony; "it cosses noat. And I'll ho'd yer by th' hand, Leg-it. Mebbe it'll mek the thing hact stronger."

"Lord A'mighty," said Leg-it in a voice that got a

hearing in the midst of that hubbub of laughter, jeers and movement, "find the lost——"

"That's me," said Loony. "I'm lost, lost!"

"Bring back the wanderer——"

"Is that me?" said Loony.

"Clean the mucky——"

"I'm mucked all ower," said Loony.

"Sober the drunken——"

"I'm as drunk as a lord," said Loony.

"Save the damned——"

"I'm not hafe damned nayther," said Loony.

A pint pot flung at Leg-it hit Loony on the head.

"Put life in the dead. To Thee we leave it; nubbut Thou can——"

The interruption came from the landlord, who had come in hastily and put his fat obstructive hand on the Methodist's mouth, saying:

"Here, stop this! My house een't licensed for preaching and praying. Yo'll gie't a ill name wi' such carryings on. Drink your stint and goo."

"You say well, landlord," said Mr. Knill. "The man's looks and language have soured my ale; draw me some more. The devil take a religion that spoils a man's drinking."

Leg-it had risen.

"It's borne in upon me," said he, "as this matter's taen out'n our hands. I'll goo back and keep quiet."

"Lemme keep ho'd on yer," said Loony. "It gied me a sore knock side th' head but I feel better for't inside a'ready."

Leg-it and Loony went out together, the curate's party went on with their game and the hubbub subsided into a pothouse calm, only some half-dozen talking at the same time. Out of whom the charcoal-burner could be heard saying:

"Roly Surety were nivver good cousins to Abel."

"Ay," said All-fours, "and if oat's happened Abel, it's lucky for him he's away; for if he warn't folk ud think much."

"He ain't away," said Ethan, "or leastways he's comed back. My mammy and her new man seed him pass our place just afore the storm broke."

"That's as true as if a Christian had spoke it," said Mikin's Bill, who was among those who had entered after Leg-it. "Our Bridget telled our Jude as he'd comed back and all ower blood."

The barber-surgeon held the teetotum between finger and thumb, but did not spin; the pinder, mere sponge that he was, lifted his hand but did not drink. All eyes turned towards the constable, who sat solemnly shaking his vacuous head over his empty can.

"What d'yer think to that, Samson?" said Tom Warmly.

"Twere short measure afore, contrairy to the stattut made and purvided nanny domino Georgy Secondy. And now it's empty."

"So bain't yo," said Crabb. "We shall do noat wee 'im to-night. But as Leg-it says, it's no consarn o' ourn. Let the Lord A'mighty and Samson Smallage sattel it atween 'em."

Said the Gipsy in a smooth soft information-seeking way, "What's the sweet name they calls them chaps what knows o' summat but doesn't tell?"

"Ay, that's it," said the blacksmith.

"Scissors!" said Joe Kipping, who did not lack courage.

"I call 'em scithers," said the parish clerk, who had but a hazy notion of what was going on.

"It's your turn, barber," said the curate impatiently.

"I'm a b-barber-ch-chirurgeon," said the man from Mansfield huskily.

"I think the parson had ought to know," said Warmly.

"What d'yo think to that, Mester Knill?" asked the blacksmith.

"I'd go myself," said the curate, "but I have my preparation for the Sabbath. Why the devil don't you spin, barber-chirurgeon?"

"Then," said Crabb, "let the weaver goo. He's better



nor a mekshift; he hes as much ale inside him as yo and shows it more."

"Be damned to you," said the curate, "he can't go; he has won tenpence ha'penny from me and owes me satisfaction. Spin her off, barber."

"I let ye to know, M—Master Journeyman-parson," said the Mansfielder, "that I'm a b-barber-ch-chirurg-geon."

"The pinder's an officer o' th' parish," said Joe Kipping.

But the pinder was evidently capable of nothing but more drinking.

"Let's all goo," said All-fours.

With him uprose half-a-dozen others on legs more or less under the guidance of their understandings, including the Gipsy, and went in a body to the rectory. As they walked along the road they talked all together at the top of their voices, agreeing with such a violent unanimity that a person unacquainted with their conversational style might have thought they were quarrelling. They called on their way at the churchwarden's; but Master Huff had been out all day with the hounds and was then abed. His dame in her nightcap opened her chamber window and spoke to them somewhat testily.

"Parish business, neighbours? Nothing but the trump o' doom ud stop his snore and raise his head. Hark!"

They hearkened, and when she slapped the window to went away much impressed.

"Well," said All-fours, "yo nedn't pretend to play the bass trumpet no more, Sam, after that."

"I ain't niver a-gooin' to," said Sam.

They had no better luck at the rectory. The rector had gone to dine with Squire Rolleston at Watnall, and unless the hospitality of that gentleman had fallen off was not to be expected home before morning. Nothing more could be done that night.

## CHAPTER XVI

### HUE AND CRY

SAMSON SMALLAGE, having slept off his drunkenness, had set out to arrest Roland with the support of a dozen stout fellows of Kirkby, armed with pitch-forks, flails, guns, hedge-stakes and bludgeons.\* The warrant which was his legal authority was a day old and only specified a breach of statutes against Papists, but it was understood by the whole party that there was at least suspicion of a graver offence, and that second among their duties would be the search for Abel, who had not yet returned home. Their first aim missed. Early as it was when they reached the Nook Roland had left it hours before.

It had been taken for granted that his mother's good-night kiss was also her final farewell. But while he stood on the threshold looking out he heard her door open; so stealthily however that he felt there was no invitation given him to notice it. From the top of the stairs she would see his form dimly outlined in the doorway; but even if he turned he knew that he should be unable to separate hers from the inner blackness. He stepped out, closing the door as quietly as if he feared to break her slumber. The moment after Press's door opened. An impenetrable darkness was between the two women, uniting, dividing, inviting confidence.

"Edith," said Fortuna, "I have thrown my son away on a lost cause. I seem to have a gift that way."

"That's all fudge," answered Press. "Mr. Roland is bound to make his way, go where he will." She put out a hand and touched her mistress. "Oh lud! you've nothing on hardly. You'll catch your death of cold."

I put your quilted night-gown handy. Come back to bed, ma'am, at once."

Such light as the sky had it did not give away; rather it made the dark earth seem darker, save where here *and there a bank of snow doubtfully reflected it.* He had no covering to his head but his own short hair, and before he set out for Scotland he had to make another and harder journey; he had to go round and take first Mistress Chaworth's sword and then his hat from where he had dropped them.

He had changed his jack-boots for foot-gear more suitable to a pedestrian, and soon the rank dank vegetation had wetted him to the skin above the knee. It was not that however which made him stop when he had gone scarcely two furlongs, stop and start back. That little glimmering patch of snow at his feet had taken to his fancy the likeness of a dead distorted face. He recognized it the moment after for what it was, but he did not thereby recover his nerve. It must be acknowledged that he had not yet attained manhood. His childish terror of the dead and especially of the disembodied living returned upon him, overwhelmed him. He had to promise himself that he would go no further until he had the comfort of the dawn, though by so doing he endangered his escape.

He crouched in a world peopled only by shadows and uncertainties and terrors and the wind's lament; a long and fearful time of waiting. But at last he saw his hands lie white upon his knees, like dead hands. He shuddered and immediately uprose. It was wanly but indubitably day in the sky, though night still cowered in that hollow. He did not stop to dwell upon his dread or his danger; he ran down. Such was his abhorrence that the speediest was the only manner of approach possible to him.

He reached the bottom of the gully and the grim grey sky opened out before him. Still he ran, bearing to the left, and ascended the next gully but one. A little way up he came to a place where the snow seemed marked

with footprints. He stopped; he could imagine it bore stains of—— He checked his imagination and looked about for the sword; but in vain. Belike that was not the spot. He ran on but with a slackened stride, a strange shortness of breath, a strange failure of strength. There was nothing before him but the sombre hillside, here dark with ling, there greyly up-lighted by a snow-wreath.

All at once he came to a stand. He was like to have trodden on his hat. And there, just beyond it, was what he feared, stiffened into the unseemly posture in which it had fallen. A dreadful half-light glimmered on a ghastly blood-dabbled face, an unstrung hand. The awful no-light in which the rest was shrouded created horror under the semblance of concealment. He looked up. There were men before him; they had risen behind a clump of gorse; four men, Samson Smallage, Leg-it, Loony and Ellis the Newstead keeper, distinctly outlined on a background of snow; and the constable held a naked sword in his hand. There were others, but shadows among shadows; there might have been hundreds, thousands, so thickly swarmed dusky unsubstantialities over that obscure moorland. He awoke to the appalling jeopardy in which he stood. It seemed to him that he was surrounded by witnesses and accusers, their eyes all levelled at him like those four men's.

The sound of voices came to him, half-a-score voices, many, perhaps hundreds, confused into one outcry. Then all together they ran at him, men and shadows. He stared and did not stir; until they were almost upon him and shadows took the reality of men. He saw All-fours' mole-skin cap, Thumb's bandy legs, the charcoal-burner's beard. Then a stronger shock of the fear which had paralyzed him galvanized him into action. He picked up his hat, turned about and with extraordinary speed darted up the steep in front of him, over the ridge and down on the other side. But as soon as he was well out of sight he stumbled into a water-worn channel over-

grown with ling, and fell with such violence that all the breath was knocked out of him. The hunters were upon him, All-fours being first; no time to rise, even if he had been in a condition for further flight. There was nothing for it, as he thought, save to lie and be taken. But the ling had closed over him, thinly covering him, and his pursuers were not prepared for the audacity of his hiding under their very feet. They rushed by helter-skelter; all but Loony, who stumbled at the same place but did not fall, though he trod on Roland's legs. He recovered himself, ran on a few yards, stopped, went back, put aside the ling over Roland's head and looked curiously down upon a white face fixed in horror and despair.

"Art aloive or deäd?" he said. "Nay, if thou can't answer a straightforrard question sure thou mun be deäd. I'm fritted on thee. Two deäd corpuses afore breakfast is more nor my poor innards can stan'."

Again he ran on; but he had lost his place among his fellows and missed the encouragement of their presence. He put his hands to his mouth and holloaed:

"Stop of me, Leg-it and surries!" They did not stop. "'Ere!" he holloaed. "See what I've fun!"

Then Leg-it stopped, they all stopped, and came trooping back. Roland was ready to rise and give himself up.

"What is't yo've fun?" said Samson, said half-a-dozen others.

"This gret big thorn i' my foot."

"B'leddy!" said Samson furiously, "I'll hae both your feet putten i' th' stocks if we loase him through this."

"That wouldn't be jonnock, Samson. This tother foot done noat but stan' by. But are we lookin' for a loive man or a deäd un?"

"A loive un of coorse, yo innocent."

"Just what I were thinkin'."

"Forrards, men!" shouted Samson; and all again bustled onwards in more hurry and even less method

than before, each under his own direction or non-direction, some beating the bushes as they went, some satisfied with a glance on this side and that, others with their greedy eyes ever in advance of their feet. All neighbourly feeling of pity was overborne by the hunting fury.

Roland, hardly believing in his escape, lay still until the hubbub of pursuit came from a distance; then he cautiously raised himself on hands and knees and peeped out. So far as he could see the retreat was clear, all his pursuers being well ahead. He crawled on hands and knees through the ling back up the slope to the edge of the descent on the other side. There was then sufficient light to show things in their proper form, though the colouring of each was a mere variation of the general grey. He paused, and lifting his head above the vegetation looked down. He saw but one thing; just under him, about three yards off, Ethan the Gipsy was clambering up. His first thought was to attempt concealment, but as he was drawing back Ethan looked up and his eyes gleamed with discovery, his voice rang out with a savage cry of exultation and announcement. Roland sprang to his feet, and giving the Gipsy no time to throw or thrust with the knife which he was drawing from his belt, jumped down upon him. The Gipsy, taken unawares, started back and thus helped the impact of the young man's weight, which tumbled him head over heels down to the bottom.

Roland stood long enough to see there were other men below cutting off escape that way; then scrambled back to the top. The rest of the constable's posse, the forward party, had turned and had him full in view. He ran as quickly as he might along the ridge, hoping thus to distance pursuit and get away northwards by Cock's Moor. But as he gained the neck of the spur he saw the Newstead keeper coming up on the right front, with gun in hand and spaniel ahead. He was being driven towards the Nook, the thing which he feared most. He swerved sharp to the left. The dog, holloaed on by

his master, bounded after him but being accustomed to him did not molest him. And so he bolted round the head of the gully in which were Ethan and his companions and that something else which had lost its name, then dashed down the next hollow. He was out of sight, but only for the moment. He knew that the Gipsy would have ample time to get round to the mouth of the ravine, that in a few seconds Ellis would be at its head, that to climb its side would be to expose him on every hand and force him back on the cottage. Maybe his mother looking through her chamber-window would see him run down by that mob of murder-hunters.

There was part of a stack of cut gorse done up in kids or bundles, most of which had been carried away for bakers' firewood, and as he ran by the sight of two loosened kids standing somewhat out from the wall of the stack gave him a desperate thought. He took hold of them, with a violent effort wrenched them out, thrust himself into the shallow cavity thus made and pulled them back upon him. At the same moment the rear-guard of the hue and cry appeared at one end of the gully and Ellis at the other.

"Hie on!" shouted the keeper.

The spaniel, mystified and demoralized by that unusual form of sport, sniffed a little at the kids, then his eye being taken with the flickering of a rabbit's scut up the bank he dashed in pursuit, and disappeared over the brow as his master met the Kirkby men near the stack. One of them—it was Thumb—was alleging, but not at all positively, being unused to unsupported opinions, that he had seen Roland by the kids, "him or his shadder or summat." Ellis pooh-poohed him aside.

"He's worrumed hissen up through them goss-bushes an' down into the next nick. He's giein' hissen and uz a sight o' trouble. Rover's on his track. He's a good dog."

"I've noat again him but his legs," said Mark Gadley; "so next time yo gleg 'im shoot 'im theer. Don't let's

be runned off of ourn a this 'ow for noat. Aim low but aim true."

Ellis went off up the hillside followed by most of the others. Ethan came limping round just in time to see and follow them. Only two remained, Thumb who for once preferred a half-opinion of his own to another man's whole one that had to be run for, and the charcoal-burner who also had had enough of early exercise. Leg-it soon came up, then Loony sorely out of breath with keeping old Leg-it in sight; after him the constable and two or three others. Samson did not hear the clamour of evidence and surmise half out. He set Thumb, All-fours and the charcoal-burner to pull the stack to pieces, and with the rest went quickly after Ellis. But the stack, though reduced in bulk, was composed of material unpleasant to handle and by no means easy to separate without the proper tools.

"Drabbit the prickles on't," said All-fours. "It's as full o' malice as a hedgehog."

"What I'm fierce to know is this," said Mark Gadley; "who the devil's to pay uz for 't?"

"'Tis no Sunday worruk and that's a truth," said Thumb consentingly.

"Coom out like a man, Roly," said All-fours, "if thou'rt in, and damn uz well for giein' thee all this trouble."

"Nay," said Mark, "he warn't nivver no great shakes at cussin' and swearin' at the best o' times."

"A scholar," said All-fours, "can damn wi'out swearin'. 'Tis the best lesson 'e larns."

"I've heerd that afore," said Thumb.

They took more interest in their talk than their work, gradually ceased pulling, loafed about, did a little scouting at their own will, then wearying of that went in search of Samson. Guided by the shrill wind-borne insults of Press they met him and two or three of his assistants just issuing from the Nook, with a crest-fallen woman-baited mien indeed but at heart well-satisfied. They had brought away from Roland's chamber a scab-



bard which matched the blood-stained sword found not far from the corpse, and also a great-coat still only half-dried and with marks upon one shoulder apparently of blood. While Press ranted below Fortuna was above frozen into the attitude of prayer—bent knees, clasped hands, contorted face—but voiceless, prayerless; thoughtless too if thought implies sequence, for her brain was set in one deep-printed impression of horror. Soon Press would go up to her and she would submit her body to tyranny, unbend her knees, unclasp her hands, but not relax that agony of brow and brain. Meanwhile Samson and his men went down to Ellis and the others who were searching Robin Hood's cave and the neighbourhood.

Roland hardly believing in his escape kept quiet for a while, though pierced by many a thorn and sorely squeezed and cramped. He was wet to the skin too, yet warm enough, and that was about all that could be said in praise of his situation. He perceived how fraudulently circumstances had conspired against him, and had little hope of escape. He thought of his mother. He determined not to be taken like a rabbit in its hole, but if discovered to give them so good a run for their money that Ellis should be compelled to shoot him dead. He tried to persuade himself that his mother would somewhere find comfort therein. Presently he would have ventured forth; but as soon as he began to push out the kids that covered his hiding-place, he heard a movement in the bracken close by. Probably it was only a startled rabbit, but it made him draw back and lie squat again. He said a Paternoster, ten Aves and a Gloria, using his fingers as a rosary. He thought of his mother. He besought the prayers of his patron, St. Ambrose. He listened and listened again. To withdraw his meditations a little from their nearest pain he pondered what other saintly or angelic protection he could most suitably implore in his extremity. With the awe of a virgin and the timidity of a boy he remembered after a while, that it was the very day which he had been

taught to hold sacred to the immaculate conception of the virgin mother. He recited what he could of the Salve Regina, and committed himself to her keeping. Once or twice he heard a holloa from not far away and believed himself warned to remain where he was. He was so wearied by his long continued agitations and exertions that as soon as he felt the tension ever so little slackened he dozed off.

He was startled out of his doze by the sound of loud voices close at hand and a violent tearing at the stack. His pursuers had returned in full number and were pulling his hiding-place to pieces, beginning at the top. There were loud objections of course as they pricked and scratched their hands, but to one and all Samson made the same answer :

"If he een't here, wheer is he? Yo've a finger, point him out."

They worked at it energetically for a quarter of an hour or so, with such effect that Roland already had glimpses of daylight from above. He gathered himself together for the final desperate effort. It seemed to him that but one more kid removed and he would be discovered. He saw that same kid shake, stir; he had the instantaneous fore-sense of the bursting-forth, the chase, the alternative of a quick death and a slow agony. In fact Samson himself had his hand upon that kid.

"Now, neebours," he was saying. "two 'r three more and if Roly Surety's here we hae him in our hands."

"Roly Surety?" quoth Loony. "Is't him yo're wantin'? Why didn't yer say so afore? Yo said 'twere a murderer yo wanted, and I don't know nubbudy o' that trade if 'teen't the butcher. Roly Surety's non here; I've seed him."

Samson had held his hand to listen; now he took it away in surprise; the kid was not removed.

"Seed him? Wheer?"

"I seed him, ay, wi' my own eyes, liggin' in a grip ower yonner, deäd."

"Yo shall pay for't, Loony, if—— But how d'yer know he were deäd."

"I trompled on 's legs an' he said noat. He warn't nivver a bad-mannered lad; if he'd been aloive he'd at least a hed the civility to abuse me for't."

Samson abused him there and then with ultra-civility.

"Nay, mester, it cooms too late for this turn, keep it for the next. Besides I axed him if he were deäd."

"What did he say to that?" asked Leg-it.

"All yo could reasonably ax of a deäd man; noat."

"Show's wheer," said Samson. "If he een't theer— and he wain't be—yo shall pay for't; yo shall be whipped at the cart-tail."

"Then, Samson, yo mun do as Mester Knill does about your boots; yo moan't pay me while I send the bill in; an' not too soon then."

"Stop your od-rotted gab and move on; yo'd best. Leave the damned stack to rot, men, and foller me."

There was a sudden rush of heavy feet, a dwindling sound; then stillness. Roland made a compact with himself. He lay quiet, lay for one hundred of his own quick heart-beats. He counted them with his hand upon his breast; then crept out. He ran softly down the gully, saw nobody and thought he was unseen. But Ethan who had gone off with the others had soon begun to hesitate, hung back, turned. And so when Roland heard a loud whistle on his left and looked round, there was the Gipsy coming down the slope after him armed with hate and a naked knife, a clean and naked knife that gleamed as if new-polished. He bounded forward just as Ethan threw his knife at short range, and hit him but only on the heel, where he was either better armed or less vulnerable than Achilles. The knife fell off; he ran on unimpeded, soon distancing the Gipsy, who stopped to pick the knife up and probably was still suffering from his late rough tumble. He reached the mouth of the gully but did not get clear away. The main body of the hue and cry was then skeltering down the side of the adjacent ravine. One of them, Leg-it,

he could see already on the level and not more than sixty yards off. He dashed to the right, turning his back on the old footman, who had worked off the stiffness of his joints and was running as well as ever he had done in pumps and petticoat-breeches. Where the ground was not matted over with drenched bracken or vexed with gorse, it was deep in wet sand or strewn with slushy snow.

Roland should have gone straight across the level for Annesley Forest, but he was thinking that perhaps his mother was still at her window. As much as he might he hugged the hill. He would not for the world that she saw him hunted like a fox. So he gave Leg-it a good ten yards in rounding the next spurlet. Nevertheless he was still about fifty yards ahead when he reached that tangled hillside which went by the name of Annesley Forest. He scrambled up, but as soon as he was at the top he saw three horsemen riding towards him on the other side, which in comparison was smooth and clear. He knew one to be Huff by his piebald. He turned sharp to the left and ran towards the deer park. Leg-it turned almost as soon as he did. The horsemen sighted him, raised a loud view-holloa and spurred their horses. Ellis was not a score of yards behind Leg-it; the Gipsy and Loony followed. To escape the horse-pursuit Roland plunged down-hill again. On the turn he looked back and made out the man on the grey to be Radage of Annesley Woodhouse. He ran and was wondering who the rider of the bay was, so that he could hardly give proper heed to his footing. He ran down by Saddle hill. Questing below on the level were the constable and the rest, a long trail, which cut him off from any chance of gaining Newstead or Papplewick by way of Aldercar.

Perforce he turned to the right, and raced—he felt it was his last effort—over the neck of Hopping hill. There Leg-it lost sight of him for a moment or two. Just beyond there is a dribble of water in a moist bottom overgrown with elder and alder, osier and maple. The

cover, sufficient though leafless, invited him to go aside. As soon as he was fairly in it he felt relief, as if only then he had got out of range of his mother's window. He stopped short, dead-beaten; stopped, and it just occurred to him that it was Miller Cowley's bay and the rider of it could be no other than Cowley himself. Now Leg-it had lost sight of him for half a minute and his eyes were dim, for he too was well-nigh spent though he was not running for his life. He went by, not at once aware that his game had taken cover. When he perceived it he stood and waited for Ellis. Then the two went up by the Rosselsike searching among the trees. But Roland had stolen gently away, recovering breath as he walked.

He felt it necessary now to trust not to pace but concealment, in which he was greatly helped by the dim undiscovering light of that cloudy morn. When trees failed him he went doubled up behind such shelter as he could get from gorse, broom and bramble. So while Leg-it and the keeper beat straight up to the gravel pit he bore to the left and skirted Ladycot hill.

Of the horsemen two had followed but had been brought to a walk by the roughness of the ground. Loony was groping after Leg-it, but Ethan was running straight on under the bluff towards the Wighay. Roland slunk round Diadem hill and into the thicknesses of the deer park.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IN THE TENT

HE proceeded at a quick walk unmolested, though every now and then he heard somewhere behind the sound of a man's voice, the tramp of a horse, the rustle or the crackle of dry wood or green. But when he was near the Piper's Stand he came upon a herd of hinds with their spotted calves. They started away from him, and immediately he heard a man shout from near at hand, heard a horse coming down the riding at a jog-trot. He stepped behind a great oak stump and had a glimpse of the piebald through the trees. At the same time he perceived a greater activity of pursuit behind. He was driven to cross the riding, and however quickly he did it was seen by Huff, who gave a shrill view-holloa, answered by holloas from no great distance in the rear.

The park had become too hot for him. There was no room to double back; he was forced to break cover, and nearer the hall and little village than he would have wished. But the safer retreat to the wilder country was being cut off by Huff, who had trotted away along the riding outwards. As he pushed on he could hear the thud of the piebald's hoofs quickly becoming fainter. He came out where the ground dips between the quarry, and the dumbles, and thence went straight up for the Derby road. He had a good start of Huff, who had gone a long way round, and who moreover when he did at last espy him had to pick his way across the dumbles, a small hollowed watercourse overgrown with rank vegetation.

Roland had got his wind again in the park. Across the road he ran and down on the other side. Before him

was a shallow treeless valley with Annesley Woodhouse on the opposite ridge, a solitary grange. He had an aim, though hardly a hope, namely to gain Selston's great wild common which lay a mile and a half away on the left. But in vain he tried to bear to that quarter. Huff was riding a good way behind and wide of him, but still always turning him towards the Woodhouse, towards the Nook. He chiefly dreaded lest after all he should be overtaken in his mother's presence. In his constant vision of her she was still standing at her window on the look-out, palely expecting.

He ran down but could not escape along the marshy bottom past Huff, who, old fox-hunter that he was, did not attempt to ride him down, but steadily stolidly going, careful of his horse and sure of the issue, was satisfied with ever pushing him towards the Woodhouse, towards the Nook, towards the main body of the hue and cry, which he judged to be somewhere on the road to the right. He ran down, and as he mounted again glanced back once and only once at the opposite hillside. There were only two footmen in sight. His eyes were half blinded with the sweat that poured off his forehead, but he thought he saw Leg-it with perhaps Loony behind. Had Ellis and the others given up, or where were they? As he ran on with the wind in his face, he was troubled more by that uncertainty than by the visible danger that was dogging him on his left and in his rear.

Strain himself as he might he was forced to pass within twenty yards of the Woodhouse. The shouts of his pursuers were blown away by the wind but by chance Jim Pordage the cowman came louncing out of the crew-yard with a stable fork in his hand. He came across Roland's path, saying in his sluggish way, "What's the mighty hurry, surry?" and seemed inclined to stop him with his fork. But Roland picked up a stone with each hand and looked so grim that the cowman let him by.

"Don't hull, surry," he said. "I own to't as the softest o' them stuns is harder nor my head."

Roland passed on, and Jim stood until he could put the same slow question to Leg-it :

"What's all this 'ere hurry?"

"He has murdered Abel Marrott," answered Leg-it gaspily.

"Not by no fair means, I'll stand to't," said Jim.

But Leg-it had shut down his mouth and was saving the residue of his breath. He trotted by, and Jim meaning to run with him was so slow in getting astart that he came along no more than abreast of Loony.

"Got any—breath," said Loony, "to lend me—while to-morrer?"

"Dollups," said Jim. "Ho'd thy mouth oppen; I'll teem some in wi' my fork."

"Nay—yo'd offend—my rotten tooth; it's some awkward-tempered. I mun wait—while yo can—spoon it in."

The piebald, unused to any pace less deliberate than a jog-trot whether going to market or following the hounds, had gained little during the ascent; Leg-it and Loony were at their last gasp; Jim Pordage was only keeping them company. There seemed some chance of the pursued outrunning pursuit. When they reached the hill-top the Erewash valley was outspread before them, with Kirkby beyond conspicuously headed by its church. But what claimed attention was the gentle slope on their right, down which some three or four men were hastening from the road to meet them. Leg-it and Loony saw, and taking the relief that was offered at once dropped to a walk. Jim saw, but it made no difference; from mere inertia he kept on running. Huff saw, and dug his heels into his lagging piebald's flanks. Roland saw, and ran as he had been running, straight ahead; ran altogether without hope, simply because it was easier to him to be taken running than standing; ran as it were nowhither; until his breath was a mere gasp and his sight not enough to choose his footing with, step by step. He ceased to mind his footing.

Suddenly he staggered; his footing had failed him;



his head swam; he seemed to be falling headlong; but a sudden stoppage and a shock rough rather than violent, and operating from his feet, not his head, seemed to show that he had recovered himself. Still his head swam. After a sort he heard a voice, but his hearing was as dull as his other senses. He felt himself seized by hands.

"I give myself up," he said, or thought to say.

He felt himself drawn a few yards; then darkness fell upon him all at once; he dropped to the ground and lay struggling for breath.

He had been going direct for the dingle of Mapple Wells in which he had seen the Gipsies' camp on yester evening. He had plunged blindly down the steepest of its nearer bank straight for Alfa's tent. She came out, understood at a glance that he was in jeopardy, sprang to him, dragged rather than drew him into her tent, then dropped the blanket over its entrance. Next moment Huff rode up to the brink of the hollow. Not seeing Roland, he supposed him to be hiding behind one or other of the scattered trees or somewhere among the abundant gorse and thorn-bushes. The newcomers were approaching the head of the dingle. The ascent of the opposite bank was almost impossible to one at the leés of his strength. The churchwarden thought they had him like a rat in a trap. But he was weighty and the piebald's legs were aged. He rode along the brow to where the descent was easier, keeping all the while a good look-out.

Alfa had put a phial to the fugitive's mouth and made him gulp some mouthfuls of a strong cordial, which seemed immediately to fill him from head to foot. She gave him a few seconds in which to recover breath and realize his surroundings; then said:

"What's agate?"

"Where am I? Who are you?" he asked in a faint hoarse voice.

"You're in the tan of a Romany chi. The English gentleman has quite forgotte'd her. That don't matter. What was you running from?"

"From men who are after me."

"What for?"

"Another man's deed."

"What sort o' deed?"

"Murder."

He shuddered, and the cordial seemed to go from him, head and foot. Evidently the pursuers were at hand. There was the clomp of heavy feet hastening down the bank and the sound of voices, as of men hoarse with hard running. Alfa peeped through an opening in the tent wall, then looked round again and pointed to a horse-rug and other clothing which, dimly seen, overlay a heap of straw on the far side of the tent.

"Lay down there."

"I shall be doing you a mischief," answered Roland, "and myself no boot. Let me out."

He felt the bitterness of being in hiding. She stopped him with a firm hand and said with a low-pitched peremptoriness:

"Do what I tell you, at once; there's no time for gab."

The voices and footsteps were then close at hand. He was too spent for controversy; he lay as he was bidden, his full length upon the straw. Then she lay beside him, nay, to his astonishment, disgust, upon him, and drew the clothes over them so that there was no appearance but of one body.

"What are you doing?" he said in a well-nigh smothered voice.

"Saving us both or doing for us both."

"What'll folk say?"

"Shut your mouth, you, and say noat," she whispered sternly. "The Gaujos are here."

Indeed it was high time they ceased their argument; the blanket was pushed aside and a man looked in, Ellis the keeper.

"Holloa! Anybody in?"

"Ay," said Alfa in the faint voice of a sufferer. "Come in; I can't get up. What d'ye want of me? Is't the yerb-doctor?"

"No."

"Zuba promised to send him," she whined.

"Have yer seed a man goo by this a-way?"

"Don't worrit me," said Alfa, turning her face from him with a well-feigned peevishness; "I've seed noat; I'm sick."

"Look if he's i' this tent," said a voice from the rear, Samson Smallage's, "yo and Thumb, whilst me and Jim goos and searches the tother un. Purr and pry about."

The keeper and Thumb pushed in.

"Look for yoursens," said Alfa; "I can't get up; I wish I could; I've a fever on me."

"What sort o' fever?" said the keeper, shrinking back.

"A baddish sort. But you needn't to be scared; it ain't catching."

"Is't small-pox?"

"Go on with your looking."

The men stood aloof and glanced round. There was nothing to be seen but a few household utensils, a small chest curiously carved, a pony's saddle and saddle-bags, an unfinished basket fancifully wrought, a small heap of rushes and osiers, and the recumbent woman.

"That'll do," said the keeper.

They withdrew.

"If 'twere me," said Ellis, "I'd a deal sooner be hanged nor hae the small-pox."

"There'd be a sight less to-do for e'erybody," said Thumb.

They joined their fellows; who having driven away a snarling cur from the door of the other tent had made a thorough search there but found nothing.

"Seed oat?" said the constable.

"Nubbut a woman smittled<sup>1</sup> wi' a fever," answered Ellis.

"I mislike the looks on her," said Thumb; "she's that red i' th' chaps."

"I'd lay my last groat as it's small-pox," said the keeper. "I wish I'd hed a sprig o' rue i' my mouth."

<sup>1</sup> Infected.

"'Tis a sure nannidote," said Thumb, "again oat catchin'."

"Well," said the constable, "it behooves uz to be catchin' summat more profitable nor that. There's nobody in the tother tent at all, nayther heder nor sheder.<sup>1</sup> He moot be dodgin' among them trees and busks by the watter side."

"Wheer's the churchwarden?" said Ellis.

"Ay, he ought to be round afore this," said Samson.

Drawled Jim, "Him and his mare was allus o' the same slow way o' thinkin'."

Just then the rider of the grey trotted down the easy descent from the head of the dingle.

"Why are you shackling about here, men?" said Farmer Radage. "Why aren't you a-backing Mester Huff up?"

"We was just a-talkin' on him, mester," said Samson.

"Rot your talk! Look yonner!"

Their eyes, following the lead of the speaker's whip, saw the churchwarden going steadily across the Bottom half a mile away in the direction of Kirkby.

"That caps all!" said Samson.

"He mun hae sight or scent on him," said Ellis.

"He's lashin' into the little oad mare like oat," said Thumb.

"Mester," said Jim Pordage in no hurry; "I don't see how the lad, bein' as he was pumped welly-nigh dry when he went by th' 'ouse——"

"Foller on, men," cried Radage, "without so much blother. Or he'll get to earth afore we can run him down. Hark forrard!"

He set the example by starting off at a hand-gallop down the dingle, and was followed by the footmen, each at his own particular speed.

The fact is that the piebald, steady-going old mare that she was, had all the morning been resenting that cross-country riding without the music of the hounds. Besides she had not been used to go a-hunting two days

Male nor female.

running, and at her time of life did not mean to get used to it. Had not the last long run been directly for home probably she would not have held on so patiently. As it was she had gone willingly enough as far as the mouth of the dingle; but when Huff pulled her off rein and would have had her turn her head up the dingle and her back upon Kirkby and her stable, she at last asserted herself. She did not bolt, she did not seize the bit with her teeth, she disdained such hot-headed frivolities. She simply took her own way at her habitual pace, and having a mouth as tough as whitleather felt as little need to obey as to resent either steady pull or furious jag at that insufficient snaffle. Authority was transferred with as little fuss in operation or brag on fulfilment as ever in the world's history.

As soon as by the sound the constable's party seemed to be fairly gone Alfa rose.

"Don't speak word," she whispered. "And don't stir foot nor finger until I say."

She peered in various directions through slits in the tent's worn blankets, then went to the other side of the tent, as far from her guest as possible, and sat on the ground cross-legged with the expression of one whose mind is concentrated. She appeared to have advanced far towards complete womanhood in the troublous half-year since Roland had last seen her. Now he did not see her; he remained covered up. Yet during his confused entrance or the next tumultuous half-minute he must have taken in with his bodily eye, without his mind's present co-operation, her Gipsy beauty with that magnificent morning flush upon it; for without actual sight it was plainly before him as he lay; it and nothing else. And while it was plain to him as something old and known it moved him like something new.

After several minutes of a strained quiet Alfa again rose and peeped through the slits and through the door. Satisfied so far she opened the small chest, disclosing a small store of provisions, out of which she took a slice of barley bread and a piece of boiled bacon and put them into Roland's hand.

"I han't any appetite for it," said he.

She poured out into a horn a smaller dose of the same cordial as before, and "Drink this," she said. As before, it revived him to an extraordinary degree, and he no longer looked on the food with disfavour. As soon as he began to eat she again went to the door, peeped, ventured out, looked the dingle up and down with the eye of a practised scout, then darted to the top of the bank, and standing well screened in the midst of a clump of broom scanned every quarter of the horizon. Looking towards Annesley Woodhouse she beheld three men, two together and a single one in front whom she made out to be Ethan; northwards between herself and the Grives there was a horseman on a bay descending Rise hill; and they were all hastening towards Kirkby. She waited with no outward sign of impatience until the rider had gone down out of sight into the trough of the valley, and the footmen had become scarcely distinguishable from the bushes scattered here and there along their way. Then she ran back to the tent.

"Up!" she said, "and quick! The Gaujos have trusted to their own thick seeing and hearing. There's not a man of 'em within half a mile of us. It's time you was moving. Zuba's out calling and Dick's gone a-fishing. Ethan seems to be in the hunt—what consarn is't o' hisn, I wonder?—but he don't often take his dog's face far away and he may sneak back any minute."

Roland got up. From the little chest she began to snatch bread, cheese, cake and thrust them into an ancient leathern wallet.

"Alfa," he said, "I shall never forget this."

She looked up from the chest, her face suddenly hot. Though he had been partly prepared he was astonished at the blaze of its angry beauty.

"You've got to forget," she said sternly. "If you don't I shall hate you. Or if I don't it'll be becoss I can't."

"I can't either," said he; "and if I could I wouldn't."

She rose, she stamped on the ground, saying:

"Hain't I telled you? Hold your jaw! But we're chattering like kids when we ought to be doing." Her manner suddenly left its fury and her voice dropped to a businesslike level. "Which way shall you go?"

"I'm following Prince Charlie—to Scotland."

"The Gaujos are atween here and Kirkby; you mun go round by Cock's Moor and Fullwood into Derbyshire. You'll easy lose 'em among them hills and hollows."

"Ay," said Roland, just recalling his mother's words, "I'll go by Ashover."

"Good. Here's a bit o' bread for you by the way." She put the wallet into his hand, which he accepted slackly as though his thoughts were elsewhere. "Who's been put out o' the way? You're slow to say."

"Keeper Marrott."

"I know somebody what ain't over fond o' him. Who did it?"

"How should I know?"

"What's that mongrel Ethan to do with following the hangman's lot? Who knows? But there's no time for telling stories. Now jal! My best hope is as you'll never clap eyes on me again."

His divided will was no match for her concentrated resolution. She pushed him out of the tent, with imperative finger pointed the way that he was to take; then before he had spoken again went back into the tent and dropped the cover over its mouth. But she must have spied upon his movements through some narrow aperture, for he had not taken a dozen steps before she was out and after him.

"If you don't put more sperrit into your going," she said, "you won't lay on Beeley Moor this night, as your need is."

"Alfa," said he, "why should you trouble yourself about me?"

"The hangman's close after you," she exclaimed, "and you stop axing fool's questions! which won't get no answer. I could fly like God's breath but must sit in the

tent, and you—— But if your own pair o' legs is so helpless you must borrow two pair more."

She whistled once and that not loud, but immediately a rough-coated little brown pony that was grazing near by lifted head and trotted up to her.

"You must ride Chuvion till you're clear o' Fullwood; that'll give you a good start. Then just do up the halter round his neck and turn him loose, and he'll make his road back without fail."

Roland mounted. The pony, which had no harness but a halter, seemed at first unwilling to submit his head to Gaujo guidance; but his mistress with a word or two, if they were words, at once brought him to submission. Roland, hovering there for a moment between starting and staying, bethought himself of Bob's token to Bell which he had on him.

"Alfa," he said, fumbling in his deep skirt-pocket, "will you do summat more for me?"

She perceived the softening of his voice and answered with a frosty "Maybe."

He brought the packet out and put it awkwardly into her hand.

"I want you to deliver it to Bell Brandrith o' Sutton Manor-house. Tell her 'tis from—— Nay, let her guess."

Thereat a thought which had been hidden below, deep as it seemed beyond all sounding, darted to the surface, and the consciousness of it overspread his cheeks like a crimson ripple. In resentment of which he struck the pony over the neck with the halter end and started him off at a gallop up the steep bank. At the top with much exertion he brought him to a momentary check, not stand, while he looked back. Alfa had already gone in. He gave the pony his will, and was borne onward at a remarkable speed by the head of the Grives and the foot of Nail Nest Hill; whence, but still keeping wide of Kirkby village, he began to veer to the west. As he rode between Sutton and Low Moor he heard the Sutton bells chime. They brought the first thought of Sunday that



had come to him that day, and with it a sense of greater security; not as though he had entered sanctuary but been wafted in spirit through the shadow of it. He had seen no sign of pursuit.

The piebald, having the start, was not overtaken either by horse or foot before she had gained her stable. Huff did not acknowledge then or ever that he had been run away with, and his apparent defection took the heart out of the search, at least until the rector's return at noon. Meanwhile most of the hue and cry passed on to the alehouse, where their tongues went with as good a will as ever did their legs. Ethan had parted company with them. Almost the first words that he heard on joining the main party had started him back for the camp. He passed his own tent and stopped at Alfa's. The entrance being closed he stood outside, called her name and spoke Romany. Again and again he called and spoke, then waited and spoke again; till at last suddenly the door-covering was raised and Alfa stood before him with a red and angry face. He fell back from her in manifest terror of her contact. Without word said she again dropped the door-blanket. He turned away with a mien between the affrighted and the suspicious and went in search of his mother. What the maid did, how looked, was hidden from the day.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CRIPPLE

ROLAND duly dismounted and turned the pony loose as soon as he had ridden beyond Fullwood, and speeding afoot across a wild waste country entered Derbyshire a little below the coal mines of Tibshelf. The sky line of the Derbyshire moorlands was before him, dimly dividing earth from heaven. But as he hastened by Morton and Stretton he seemed to get no nearer to them, as though they held aloof, sullenly refusing him shelter and security. But the wind backed; going up from Stretton he had it blowing strongly and keenly in his face, and the sun seemed to be in half a mind to make a belated appearance. He was nearing Ashover before he once thought of eating or resting. Even then he did so not of his own impulse but through a beggar, who stopped him and would have begged a penny in God's name to save him from clamming. This fellow did not indeed seem to have been recently within a long hail of starvation, but was as lusty and weather-hardened a vagabond as one could meet with in a month of travel. Bull-necked he was, straight-backed, broad-shouldered, and only in his limbs defective. Arms in truth he had none, and his short bandy legs raised him barely half a yard from the ground, though his feet were of more than the usual size. His big low-browed head was uncovered except by a thick tangle of such coarse black hair as also flourished on his chin, throat and cheeks and bristled out of his wide nostrils. He wore a leathern jacket drawn in at the waist by a leathern belt, and from a thong over his right shoulder and under his left arm hung a leathern bag. At his heels there slouched a big ugly vicious-looking dog, brindled as to colour and

mongrel as to breed, having all the worst points combined of bull-dog, mastiff, sheep-dog and lurcher; rat-tailed, weak in the stern, heavy in the head, crop-eared, blear-eyed and bow-legged.

"I can spare no money to give you," said Roland, "but if you like to sit and share my larder, such as it is, you're heartily welcome."

"An offer o' that sort," said the cripple, "I hanna said nay to sin fust I could work my chaps."

He sat down where he had stood, while Roland was looking for a dry stone or log.

"In a matter of aitin' an' drinkin'," said the cripple, "t' fust place is best an' t' next second-best."

It was a secluded spot in a dip of the road before the rise into the village, and ascending ground on every side curtailed the prospect. Parallel to the road ran a clear brook. Roland at his leisure found a seat on the protruding roots of a thorn and opened Alfa's wallet, while the beggar's eyes followed his every movement with the fierce expectancy of a brutish appetite. He took out the small loaf of barley bread, the cheese, the cake. If eyes could eat, the beggar's eyes would have devoured them forthwith. But there was something else at the bottom of the wallet and Roland produced that also; a small parcel done up in a crimson silk handkerchief, which he held by one corner and carelessly shook out thinking of mere eatables. A glittering string of gold coins fell upon his knees, those which Alfa usually wore round her neck. For a moment he looked at them in astonishment, then quickly gathering them up put them back into the wallet. At the same time he glanced across at the cripple; but he whose eyes had been so keen for the victuals did not appear to have seen the gold. His gaze was fixed on the west horizon, above which the sun, rid of the clouds, was at last blazing fiercely forth.

"The wynd blows bitter co'd," he said. "We mun be thinkin' o' shelter for t'neet; so what about this 'ere bite o' summat, young mon?"

Roland cut the provisions into halves, and for want of hands to put his guest's portion into placed it at the man's nod beside him on the ground. The cripple with his head roughly butted away his cur who would fain have been a sharer, then he stooped and set his great strong teeth into the food like another dog. Roland pitying the animal's savage disappointment flung him a morsel of his own; but his master kicked him back and snapped it up himself.

"Let him bide while neet," he said, "with an empty belly; he'll be all t' keener for t' wark he has on hond."

He ate so doggishly that he had finished before Roland, who had not been playing meanwhile, was half through. Then he immediately rose to his feet with the last mouthful distending his heavy jaws. Roland felt the spur of a sudden suspicion and sprang up with the wallet in one hand, his food in the other.

"Ay," said the beggar, "I were just thinkin' so mysen. It's iipe time for to be leggin' it. Which road art travellin'?"

"Straight forrard for the present," answered Roland.

"So's mysen, for t' present; and if thou'st noat to say agen it, young mon, I should be main glad o' thy comp'ny an' purtection, not bein' able, as thou sees, to lift a hond for mysen."

"I'm forced to go fast," said Roland, who for the study he was giving the fellow's face did not like it any the better.

"I'm a poor wither-shanks, 'tis true, but I can hotchel along as fast as I'm forced."

"Come along then," said Roland, and put the remainder of his provisions back into the wallet.

It was as the man had boasted; though so crippled he managed by some strange gait of his own, that was neither walking, running nor leaping, to keep up with the younger man however much he forced his pace. The dog always lagged behind. Within a furlong the road had risen so much that the church and houses of Ashover came again into sight before them, and on their

left beneath the sun a high tor peered above the lesser and nearer elevation. The hills, which as Roland hastened had been holding back so sulkily, had, it seemed, while he rested jumped to meet him. The sun's down-smiting rays lighted up the sky line of that lofty edge, showing every inequality, every stunted tree or bush, every rock or boulder that broke its uniformity; but the cliff beneath, so much as could be seen, was the more enwrapped in haze and mystery, seemed the more grimly perpendicular and inaccessible. He stopped and looked. Its repellent aspect promised, while the comfortable engardened dwellings in front of him only threatened.

"Is there any near way up yonder high hill?" he asked.

The cripple laughed a laugh that had the harshness of a snarl.

"Ay, surely," he said, "if thou'st a fancy for a bed on t' moors to-neet. Yon's Cocking Tor, and there's plazen beyond where a mon might lig for a week and hide hissen from a harmy. Ho'd thee!" Roland had impetuously started to cross the valley, going straight for the brook. "Stop! thou'rt gooin' wrong fust-off. No need ayther to wet foot wadin' or sprain back jump-in'. I'll put thee in a form mysen; 'twill be fair payment for that mite o' bread."

Roland had an abhorrence of the man's company, yet did not see his way to rid himself of it, nor indeed to do without it. The cripple led him a little way back. Again the tor was hidden behind the intervening hillock. They crossed the stream by stepping-stones, followed its course for a while, then turned off and climbed the hillock, so coming into nearer and completer view of what was behind it; a slight descent into a narrow dale dotted with trees, a steep ascent therefrom crowned in the part directly opposite to them by a limestone cliff. The whole face of the cliff and the ascent to it was in the shade, in austere contrast with the sunlit atmosphere above.

They crossed the dale aslant, edging away from the tor. The cripple pointed out a stone mansion on their right, square built, facing down the valley.

"Netherton Hall," he said. "If I was a bloody Pope's mon I could mak a free living out o' them two oad hags as lives there. But God bless King Georgie, says I."

They began to ascend, and nothing more was said for a while by either of them; they had scant breath to spare. No wonder if the cripple showed a difficulty in keeping up with his long-legged companion. Nevertheless Roland could not put away a suspicion. Whenever the cripple lagged he turned as though to recover breath, and waited until they were again abreast. This happened four or five times during the long ascent. At length they reached the brow of the hill, a windy solitude on the edge of a moor. Downwards the long slope was green but up there all beneath the sky was grey; ashen grey the limestone cliff on the right, darkly grey the moor, lighted up here and there by the flash of a patch of snow grey-white. The sun's almost level rays assailed their eyes. The wind blew a gale that filled their ears. Suddenly but quietly the dog ran forward between Roland's legs and only just failed of tripping him up. Recovering himself and at the same moment looking quickly round he caught the cripple in a strange attitude; his head down, his feet set for a spring, for all the world like a thick-necked tup resolved on instant mischief against a rival tup. As soon however as the cripple perceived that he was seen he lifted his head, made a pant or two, let forth a sort of lowering laugh and said:

"I'm fair bet. Thou mun mak shift wi'out me. I'm gooin' back to Asher. Kape along side o' t' moor while thou cooms to a pad; 'twill tak thee smack into t' 'eart on't. Hast ivver a bit o' brass on thee for to buy a poor mon a lodging this co'd neet?"

Roland took out sixpence, and keeping a wary eye upon him dropped it in his bag.

"I doubt I'm robbin' thee o' thy last trifle o' silver. Well, for aw that look out for foot-pads; they conna know as I ha stripped thee so bare."

So the cripple with a laugh that smacked more of insolence and malice than of mirth; then he turned without more leave-taking and went downhill. Roland walked along the brow of the hill by the moor side, taking the cripple's direction in lack of any other, though he had little confidence in it. He did not need the hint about foot-pads; he often looked back but saw no more of the beggar. Moreover he went aside to the first big gorse bush, crouched under it, and having cautiously taken Afra's necklet from the wallet tied it garter-wise under his breeches above the knee. Presently the ill-marked track led him or seemed to lead him past a small planting of oak. The sun was on the point of setting behind some far-off mysterious ridge, and seemed bent on first emptying his quiver of its gleamy arrows. His horizontal archery filled the air, perplexed the vision.

Suddenly he heard close behind him a dog's sharp bark. He looked quickly round over his right shoulder, and there was the cripple's cur with his teeth all agrin threatening his legs. But while he stood atwist in that ill-balanced attitude with his attention wholly rearward, the cripple himself stepped out of the planting in front of him. Springing at him, head down, like a ram, he crashed into his ribs just under the heart and hurled him violently to the ground, where he lay gasping. In an instant he dropped on his knees, seized the wallet between his strong teeth and with the dog's clever help dragged it away. Also with his teeth he pulled at the boy's coat and tore out the different pockets. From one he took in his mouth a purse not very heavy and dropped it into his bag; from another but a flimsy piece of paper, which he let fall. Thereupon Roland opened his eyes and gave signs of coming round. An ugly look came into the cripple's eyes; he lifted his foot as though to use it violently; but at the same moment the

cur uttered a low warning growl. The man listened. Athwart the wind he heard faintly the bark of a dog, the bleating of sheep and a man's voice. He immediately hastened off through the planting downhill as fast as he could shamble. His dog snapped the wallet up in his mouth and followed him.

"Yugh-ho, ugh-ho, ugh-ho!"

So sounded a man's voice across the wind, mingled with sheep's baas and a dog's bark. Roland tried to rise, but fell back with a groan and swooned away. Soon the sheep, which had been hidden by a slight dip in the ground, came into sight, a small flock of horned wethers, long-tailed and legged. Their leader as he went by stopped, looked curiously at the prostrate body and passed on. Each wether as it came up did the like, stopped and looked and passed on.

"Yugh-ho, ugh-ho, ugh-ho!"

After them came the dog, a black and white sheep-dog; he stopped and looked, but waited for his master, a tall round-shouldered weather-beaten old codger in smock-frock, wide-brimmed hat and leather gaiters.

"Haha, Rough!" said he in a loud high-pitched voice, "what hae we here? A piece o' ronk rascality I'm afeared. Deäd? Not a ounce o' doubt about it." At that moment Roland opened his eyes again. "Nay, Rough, the lad's so far from bein' deäd that he's wick.<sup>1</sup> What's gotten thee, young mester? Spake to me. He's spacheless, Rough. At laste tell uz so much as this: whether thou con spake or no."

So far as he might with look of intelligence Rough took part in the colloquy; but Roland made no answer, only his gaze instead of wandering at large was directed at the speaker. Soon with the help of the old man's hand he sat up, though the movement evidently pained him, for he uttered a groan and put his hand to his left side.

"That's better, lad, that's a saight better. To sit an' sike's a saight better nor to lig mum. Now tell me

<sup>1</sup> Quick, alive.



an' Rough what ails thee. Hast been frettened by Hob-i'-th'-Hurst, took wi' a fit or struck wi' a stick?"

A sickly shiver shook Roland from head to foot, but he answered in a faint voice:

"A man with a dog."

"Well, mysen's a mon an' Rough's a dog; an' noat again t' character of nayther on's but poverty."

"Without arms."

"Well, I hae two an' a hook, which maks thray; an' Rough has fower legs, which for shape i' this hill country is better nor hafe legs an' hafe arms."

"I'll mark him when I see him again," said Roland with a puling ferocity.

"Now thou spakes loike a Christian. Next thing is to see if thou'st proper use o' thy legs."

Sustained by the shepherd's strong grip under each of his arm-pits Roland managed to rise to his feet, not without pain, and he was forthwith taken with such a dizziness that he reeled and almost escaped the shepherd's hold. At a mere waft of the shepherd's arm Rough ran forward and with two or three authoritative yaps collected the sheep, which had begun to spread and graze.

"Now, lad, try if thou canst put one foot afore t' other. Noat bigger nor a set-cock<sup>1</sup> can gang forrard wi' both feet together."

With the old man's support and encouragement Roland put one foot before the other; and so, though his side pained him and his vision was still somewhat blurred, and his two legs were not completely of one mind as to the direction they should take, nevertheless he was able to make some sort of lagging progression, while Rough steadily drove the sheep on before. They had a full half-hour of such walking along a narrow path slanting down the face of the hill and under the dark shadow of the cliff, during which they passed from day to dusk, from dusk to moon-tempered night. Then they came to a tiny cottage or rather hovel, a dilapidated

<sup>1</sup> Missel-thrush.

construction of rough stones ill-thatched over with rotten straw. While Rough and the sheep passed on the shepherd stopped, opened the cottage door and led Roland into an unlighted room. He seated him on a cricket, one of two that stood by the fireless hearth; but as soon as he withdrew the support of his hands Roland felt given over to the dizziness that had been at him all along, and he slid down helpless to the earthen floor. As the shepherd stood over him at a loss a woman entered, and standing before the door could be seen in outline from within as a tall gaunt mannish old woman.

"What sort of a mess is this'n 'thou'st bro't me in, Lijah Bailey?" she said in a hoarse deep voice.

"A poor lad, Ag; I picked him up on t' moor. He's been sore mishandled, I doubt, by some laupin' foot-pad."

She took down a tinder-box from the mantelshelf and chipped at a flint, as she said with a dissatisfaction that perhaps concealed a pity:

"For oat thou know'st for sartain by him, I reckon, he mebbe foot-pad hissen mishandled by honest travellers."

"Gentle or simple, honest mon or thafe, anyhow he's fair on's back, Ag, on t' floor."

"I can see that much for mysen. And there he'll ha to lig, for we conna daidle him up steps to bed if we wanted to."

"T' floor's a hard bed, Ag, for a sick yed. Couldstna spreed summat unner him so's——"

"Ho'd thy silly oad tongue an' hark to me." Having by that time struck a spark and encouraged it into a flickering flame, she lighted therewith a rushlight which stood on the table. "We munna foul t' blanket putting it unner him; so goo to t' 'ouse and borry a hoad sack or two. An' put a little clane straw in 'em."

"Reet, reet. An' I mun see at same toime if Rough has gotten them wethers in; for though he has a mon's sense he hasna a mon's honds for to open doors."

"What a bletherin' oad chap thou gets for sartainlye. I could a gone an' done an' coom by this."

The shepherd conquering a rheumatic limp hurried off. His wife doffed the man's battered hat that she wore over a dingy blue and white handkerchief that was knotted under her chin; doffed her man's ragged coat and discovered a red petticoat, and above that a green gown gathered up about her waist. On her feet she had a man's thick clumsy much cobbled shoes tied on with shreds of cord, and her rough hands, weather-beaten face and disordered dress testified that she had come straight from some uncleanly and toilsome occupation. She folded her man's coat inside out and put it gently under Roland's head. He stirred and moaned and shivered and opened his eyes.

"Bonny face, bonny face!" she muttered; then said aloud, "How did'st happen, lad, on such a mishap?"

"A beggar-man butted me down."

She bustled about and kindled a tiny coal fire on the hearth, washed her hands and face, let down her gown, spat on her hands and smoothed her few straggling locks of grey. She was busy getting a frugal supper ready when Lijah came back with two sacks half-filled with clean straw. She laid them along the floor by the wall on the driest side of the room. It was so small a room that the sacks and an unguarded flight of rough stone steps to the attic above took up nearly half of it. The remainder was well-nigh filled by the rude hearth, a board on trestles that served for table and a couple of crickets or oblong stools.

"Poor lad," said the shepherd, "I doubt he's used to more comforts nor we can gie 'im."

"Kape thy blether while I ax for't," said Ag. "Tak 'im by t' shou'ders an' help me, do, to drag him a this side, so I dunna tumble 'ower his long legs doin' about."

But Roland, when he understood what was wanted of him, rose and walked of himself, though he felt again that sharp pain in his side. But as soon as he was laid on the sacks with Ag's coat under his head and Ag's

spare linsey-woolsey petticoat about his shoulders, he shut his eyes again and gave small heed to what passed around him; only opening his mouth to give a repeated refusal of a share in his hosts' supper.

Ag and Lijah sat on the crickets over the little fire with their bowls on their laps only half full of what they called thin pudding, that is to say boiled milk thickened with oatmeal. It would have been better with a little butter, but not having it they did without. They ate with loud hungry supplings and not much talk. Then or thenabouts something caught the housewife's eye, a glimmer of white inside Roland's hat, which lay on the floor at her feet. She said nothing at the moment, eating was too important a matter to be interrupted save on necessity, but when the wooden bowls and horn spoons were emptied, washed and put back in the cupboard, she picked the hat up, laid it solemnly on the table, showed the white cockade inside, and said with a somewhat lowered voice:

"Dost know what that manes, Lijah Bailey?"

"No, not I," answered Lijah, "if 'tis more nor a bit o' riband."

"Then I do know; I were kitchen-wench to Madam Alliott afore we was married. Thou'st bro't me a bonny fairing to-dee, Lijah Bailey." She lowered her voice yet more. "This manes treason again t' king, or else I'm a ligger. What dost think to thy judgment now, Lijah Bailey?"

"Thou wunna turn t' poor lad out o' doors, Ag, at neet an' aw?"

"Me? What next, I wunner? Thou talks as if I'd fetched him in. Nay, I'll ha noat to do wi' suchlike doings, but them as fetched him in may tak him out."

"But——"

"Just lemme get one word in, Lijah. Thou mun tak this unner thy cooät an' goo down to t' hall an' ax to see t' ladies an' show 'em it. Quallity may hae t' reet to tak up wi' such gallers-like whims an' fancies, but

labourin' folk mun addle their victuals an' kape their yeds on for to ate 'em."

"Mun I ax 'em to do oat for him?"

"Mun thou? Nay, mon, thou munna. For one thing gentlefolk ud a saight liever be hanged nor put straight by such as thee. Besoides they'll non gie thee toime. They'll a made up their minds afore ivver thou'st done hummin' an' hawin' an' scrapin' thy boots on t' floor."

"Thou'rt in a hurry to get rid o' t' poor feller."

"For his good, thou thick-yed, an' wer own. Wi' thy shepherdin' an' my buddlin' we conna hardly find wersens; I nubbut send 'im wheer he'll be up to t' neck i' plenty." She reached over Roland's head to put the salt-box back in the little cupboard. "An' I want to get to t' cupboard wi'out scrawmin' ower a mon. Now goo, whilst I smoke my pipe o' bacca."

## CHAPTER XIX

### MISS MOLLY

THE hall was that plain square-built mansion of no great size to which the cripple had called Roland's attention as they crossed the valley. It was hardly a stone's throw from the hut, and was Mistress Alliott's jointure house. There she lived, an elderly widow, with her maiden sister Ann Chance. Both ladies were vehemently Jacobite, and Elijah's story together with the production of the white cockade greatly excited them. Mistress Ann, who was the more impulsive of the two, would have it that he had been wounded in the cause of their ~~rightful king~~. She poohed aside her sister's cautions about damp, night air and lumbago. With no more delay than putting on thicker shoes and a furred and hooded cloak she went off with the shepherd, leaving Mistress Alliott to arrange everything for the stranger's reception. Only that imperative whisper of hers between the opening and shutting of the hall door was this:

"He shall have my chamber, which is rightly yours. Don't make your mouth ugly with captious objections. 'Tis settled; for it has a fire-grate and a fire in't all day long, and is the warmest in the house."

"Only on one condition, sister Ann; that you take mine."

"That's a monstrous unfair clause, sister Alliott. Your chamber stinks vilely of your tobacco smoke. Besides the red room will suit me and my complexion a vast deal better. But I see by the serenity of your eyebrows that your mind's made up, and I can't stay to unpick it; I know too well the labour of such an operation."

Mistress Alliott had the chamber quickly prepared without any fuss, and contrived with no suspicious show of contrivance that not a servant witnessed Roland's arrival and passage up-stairs. Supported by Elijah and Ag and attended by Mistress Ann, he made the short journey more easily than could have been expected. As soon as he was put to bed Mistress Alliott went down-stairs to compound a soothing plaster of bruised parsley and fresh butter; while the shepherd and his wife were dismissed by Mistress Ann with a crown piece in their hands, and with a caution in their ears to be chary of speech concerning the new arrival.

"Thankee, ma'am," said Ag. "'Tis wrote down i' t' Bible, 'A mon shall be judged by 's deeds, but fust he mun be fun out by's words.' There's no fear o' me; nor o' Lijah nayther so long's he's ruled by me; which shall be while he's putten safe unnerground, at laste."

The ladylike pallor of Roland's complexion as he lay back on the pillows would seem to have given Mistress Ann an idea.

"If we let it be thought," she said, "that our visitor is of the female sex, 'twill be all the better for his safety and my maiden reputation. And 'tis like enough that even in our family we have had worse-looking misses."

"For all his greet scrawmin' shanks, ma'am," said Ag, "he maks just as he ligs the prattiest lass I've seed of mony a long dee."

"Save and excepting the present fair company, it behoves you to say."

"Nay, nay, ma'am; trewth's fairer nor fair words. Madam Alliott has yet the hinder ends o' beauty, but yo nivver was noat eyable, ma'am, but when yo was ayther smilin' or giein'."

"What do you think, Elijah, of your dame's taste?"

Said Elijah, "God'll mend it, ma'am, at his own good pleasure."

"Ah, you're for putting all on God, like the poor man-contriver that you are; when you might have asked me to improve it with a smirk or a shilling."

"'Twas as fair a answer, ma'am," said Ag, "as yo'd ony raison to look for. But coom, Lijah; when thou begins to prate 'tis high time for both on's to mak room for wer better's."

After seeing Ag and Elijah safely out of the house, Mistress Ann returned to the bed-side and sat there awhile silent, listening apparently to the patient's laboured breathing. Then she rose, and taking a candle from the mantelshelf went to a mirror on the wall and looked herself over. She was still looking when her sister entered with the plaster in one hand and cupping-glasses and scarifier in the other.

"What are you doing, sister?" said Mistress Alliott.

"Harvesting wrinkles. I've gotten a wagon-load on the plot of land from this ditch to that wood-side, and a good scattering left for the gleaners."

"Wrinkles, child? You've as smooth a skin as ever any woman of fifty-five——"

"The devil take your arithmetic, sister Alliott. Leave me to my bean-flower water and give all your attention to a younger and more attractive miss."

Mistress Ann answered her sister's look of surprise by pointing to the bed.

"I'm the author, sister, of a second making of woman out of man. I won't venture to compare my Eden with the original, but"—she glanced towards the bed and dropped her voice—"if the primitive Eve was a better-looking lass, 'twas well for Adam he was the only man-gardener."

Then she gave the necessary explanation.

The operation of cupping was skilfully performed, the plaster was of accredited virtue, Mistress Alliott administered besides a composing draught of cowslip and elderberry syrups and the bed was as comfortable as abundance of downy cushioning and woollen covering could make it, but for all that her patient did not have a good night. Left alone with the night's silence and darkness, unbroken but by the wood fire's underbreath chirpings and hissings and the comings and goings of



its wayward light, which in truth were hardly perceptible through the heavy drapery of his becurtained and betestered bed, he drowsed off into a condition that was neither wide-awake nor lost to sensation; or if for a moment he were so lost he flickered back to consciousness at each inbreath. That pang in his side as he breathed pinned him to the present, but at the same time he was always being pursued, always on the point of being hunted down, by gangs of running constables, by mobs of deformed ruffians, by packs of wolfish dogs, troops of squalid Highlanders, hordes of dead faces with eyes all astare, chins all dropped, set on bodies preternaturally active. The scene changed like the actors in it with a bedevilled suddenness; from tangled wood to bare plain, to desolate moor, populous town, pit-like valley, crag perpendicular. But whatever the shift his mother was always there, Alfa was always there, looking on powerless to help, their hands helpless as their affrighted eyes.

Twice, may-be thrice in the night one of those phantoms, his mother's, put on flesh and came bodily; came and opened the curtains, gave him cowslip tea to drink, arranged his pillows, smoothed his bed, let him hold her cool hand—her hand was always cool—between his hot ones; even spoke to him with only such a difference in the voice as must be when the hearer's ears are dis-tempered. But even while he listened and while he held, somehow the substantial always faded away again into the fantastic. At length however the eyes of his imagination and his bodily senses were for a while wrapped up in the same sound slumber.

When he awoke it was daylight, such daylight as could come through thick puce bed-curtains, and hanging over him was a face which he took to be his mother's. He felt no wonder; he was not yet clear of the unrealities of the night.

"Good-morning, mother," he said. "But why do you wear that odd cap?"

"Good-morning, son," answered the voice belonging

to the face, yet not his mother's. "I wear it because I am used to wearing it."

"And that," said another voice from behind, Mistress Ann's, "is as good a reason for feminine headgear as you will find on this short winter's day."

But Mistress Alliott opened the curtains a little more, making clearly distinguishable the elderly face corresponding to that elderly voice. Roland's attention was now so set upon the wrinkles, the grey hair, the widow's cap, that any real likeness there might be underlying them escaped him.

"You think I somewhat favour your mother?" said Mistress Alliott.

"No, madam, not at all. I beg your pardon; 'twas the dim light."

And yet as soon as he had spoken, that cheek of hers which was most in the shade appeared to him to be the very image of his mother's. Before he had said so—he was on the point of saying so—she stepped back a yard into the unobstructed light; pallor and crows-feet again predominated over resemblance. He tried to sit up, and again felt that stab in his left side. The happenings of yesterday, hitherto only present to him as an obscure background to that quiet chamber, took their proper place and importance in his memory.

"Ladies, I must go," he said, "and that without delay. If you will kindly withdraw for a while I will rise."

He tried again to sit up, but the pain forced him back on his pillows.

"We withdraw for no such purpose," said Mistress Ann.

"You must needs rest as you are, son," said Mistress Alliott, "until the surgeon arrives."

"In taking me in, ladies, you run a risk you are not aware of."

"We are well aware on't," said Mistress Ann, "but so far from fearing it we court it."

She put his white cockade on the orange-tawny coverlet before his eyes.

"'Tis not that; that would have been an honour to have been taken up for. But this tother—oh, 'tis a rank disgrace! 'tis horrible!"

"What are you speaking of?" asked Mistress Ann.

"Have you heard no talk of a murder?"

What with the pain and the shame he was deadly pale.

"Murder? No. But if we had?" said Mistress Ann.

Said her sister more deliberately, "We should not easily be persuaded that you were concerned in it."

"Mother of God!" he exclaimed, "I did not touch him until——"

Therewith such a shudder shook him that he felt it in his side like a succession of knife-thrusts; and he gasped again. Mistress Alliott took command in a manner there was no gainsaying.

"I bid you lie still, son," she said, "and speak no more until I give the word." She held a smelling-bottle to his nose and applied a cloth steeped in vinegar to his forehead. "You must feel yourself to be altogether incapable of removal in your present condition; but you are among friends who for the love of God and the true Catholic faith and the good old cause will serve you and save you to the best of their power. No, not a syllable. Sister Ann, I leave you in charge whilst I go down-stairs."

She went out, but presently returned with Roland's breakfast, such milk diet as she thought suitable for his condition, a small bowl of oatmeal flummery flavoured with a bay leaf and sweetened with honey, and after he had eaten moderately of that a few spoonfuls of a sack posset.

About noon came the surgeon, who had been sent for from Chesterfield, a Jacobite, a safe man, looking very dignified withal in full-bottomed tie-wig and sword. Two broken ribs was his diagnosis. He let blood of course, bandaged the patient up tightly, spoke learnedly, recommended pap-meat casually, ate his dinner heartily

and rode away, leaving the rest of the cure to Mistress Alliott.

After tea-drinking, as Roland sat up supported by a very bank of pillows and somewhat more at ease in his body, Mistress Ann kept him company, and he told her briefly and by littles of his ride to Derby and subsequent events. Which so much excited her that she asked him twenty questions in a string. Yet she showed the rears of prudence, and always interrupted him before he had properly answered any with "I talk just because I do, like the giddy-pated miss that I am. You who appear to have come to years of discretion must use it." Or she said, "I don't ask for the answer; only for the question." Or "Not one word more until you have my sister Alliott's licence under hand and seal." For all those checks she got so much by way of answer or otherwise, that when she communicated the gist of it to Mistress Alliott, the elder lady was so seriously impressed that she only slipped in one sharp sisterly reproof by the bye.

The need of extreme caution was obvious. They could think of no better mode of concealment than to follow up Mistress Ann's first fancy and keep his identity covered up under a feminine disguise. It would take a whole chapter to treat worthily of their scheming to smuggle razor and shaving-pot into the house. Old Ag, herself impenetrable, was trusted with keeping Elijah tongue-tied. No servant was let into his room except one of the under-maids, who spoke with a stutter and was so unobservant and unretentive, that she could not be taught to make any difference between silver and pewter, china and delf. She only saw him a few times, and then he was abed, fresh-shaved and with a lady-like nightcap on; she never heard him speak. All she succeeded in conveying to her fellow-servants was the idea of a pink ribbon and a pale face. However they had already felt after, selected and put together a myth in lieu of knowledge. The invalid up-stairs had been named to them somewhat at random as a Miss Molly

who had met with a horse accident. Within an hour it came to be whisperingly accepted down-stairs that it was no other than Miss Mary Alliott, niece to Mistress Alliott, a proud pug, who having met with a fall out hunting—or otherwise—had been sent to her aunt's to get the damage made good as quietly as possible. The readiest explanation of the greatest difficulty will ever be most in favour; that "otherwise," encouraged by male grins and female head-tossings, soon thrust itself to the front and elbowed all competitors, whether adverbial or conjunctival, back into oblivion. The old servants naturally began to romance anew about Miss Fortuna, a long neglected theme. When at length the defamatory surmise came round to the ladies' ears, instead of upsetting themselves as their modern sisters would probably do in the effort to express bad temper in good language, they swore a little privately and then quietly sent Thomas on some trifling errand to their niece's home. There he saw Miss Mary in perfect health, came back next day with the news and helped at fitting the ready-made scandal on another innocent Miss Molly. But that was within a day of Roland's departure.

His recovery was rapid under Mistress Alliott's doctoring and nursing. Indeed that lady's skill was not small in the use of herbs compounded or simple, as teas, syrups or diet-drinks, in plasters, poultices, salves, balsams, powders, wound-waters, styptics or cordials; it even went so far as simple surgical operations. All which was bettered by her attention and kindness, which were uniform and great. She always addressed him as "son."

Mistress Ann called him by his Christian name and was his entertainer. She had a quickness of apprehension, a liveliness of manner and a directness of speech that gave a relish to her most trivial conversation. In her turns of phrasing and modes of thought and a subtle underlying something less easily defined she often reminded him of his mother, in spite of an obvious difference of temperament; just as he was sometimes

aware of Mistress Allcott's lurking facial resemblance to his mother for all the dissimilarity of expression. In their many talks together he was many times within an ace of unconsciously revealing his parentage, once particularly when he spoke of John Every, but his own habitual reticence acted on the ladies' natural delicacy, making them chary of all merely personal questions; again their restraint reacted upon him, tightening his reserve, so that he hardly owned to more than this; that he was son to a Mistress Surety living apart from her husband on the borders of Sherwood Forest.

Their conversation often went back to his ride to Derby; the ladies' pure enthusiasm for the Stuart cause rekindled his own and his eagerness to escape the hangman slunk into the second place. His inability to communicate with his mother was his chief care. His hostesses justly considered that any attempt to do so during his forced inactivity would be dangerous, but they promised that when he was again fairly upon his way she should no longer be left in ignorance of his safety. Fortuna however was not so altogether without information and comfort as he feared.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE HUNT IS UP

A LIGHT was burning in Fortuna's chamber all through the night following Roland's escape. The lonely unwedded woman was keeping a vigil of prayer and fear. As regularly as she dropped a bead for an Ave she dropped one for the suggestion of a new solicitude or the recurrence of an old one. But about midnight she heard all through a decade of Aves a sound, which floating up from without gradually developed from a freak of the wind into an ordered melody. At first she heard half consciously, then gave her mind to it instead of to the words of the periodic Gloria which ruled her tongue, ceased her formal muttering before the Amen and started up from her knees. For the sound, growing in precision, had at length taken form as "The Hunt is Up," one of her son's favourite songs; not however rendered after his robust fashion but chanted, little more than hinted by a subdued female voice. She was afraid as at a touch of the preternatural. She went quickly to Press's room and woke her without disturbing the sounder slumbers of the kitchen-wench. Press did not waste time listening or surmising; she straightway opened the casement and called out:

"Who's there?"

"Sh!" answered the voice at little more than a whisper. "I bring news of the lady's son. He's safe, so far; he has gotted clean away."

"God be thanked!" exclaimed Fortuna.

The maid stood aside; the mother put her head out of the window.

"You have the voice of an angel," she said. "Where is he?"

"Sh! We have to do with very light-eared folk. I dunno just where, lady. And if I did, I dussn't give it that much wind to tell it out from here. But when I do know you shall. I'll come and tell it so's only one ear shall hear. But I must lay by for a few days. For his sake. Now I go; I may be looked for and missed. Good-night, lady."

"Good-night, my good angel, and a mother's thanks."

They did not hear the messenger go, and after a minute's silence Fortuna said softly:

"Are you still there?"

But there was no answer; she was gone.

"Do you think it might be an angel, Press?" said Fortuna, softened beyond her wont and perhaps a little bewildered.

For not till then did she fully realize the terribleness of her terror, not until she had lost one half of it. The force of the whole fear had been so great as to blunt her sensibility to fear.

"An angel, ma'am?" answered Press. "Not her, ma'am; unless maybe there's Gipsy angels."

"There may be."

"Well, my fancy's for angels with ladyliker complexions. Now let me get you ready for bed, ma'am, or Mr. Roland when he comes back'll be sure to think it's my fault as you've gone off."

"Leave me for five minutes. I have something yet to do before I can sleep."

So for five minutes her maid left her with her fears and her hopes and the sweet tearful humility of gratitude.

About a week later Fortuna was in the garden, showing a pale anxious face to its flowerless sunless aspect. She had her gardening gloves, Press had put them on for her; her gardening tools lay at her feet, Press had brought them out to her. But those were mere forms; she did not attempt to work either with fork or rake, but leant against the yew-tree in the corner, grim support, and looked northwards. She was thus looking when from the other side of the beech-wood hedge, still thickish with



russet leaves, she heard a soft low voice humming "The Hunt is Up." For a moment she was less pale, then in a moment was paler. She went to the hedge; it was almost as high as herself; she could just see braids of black hair and a glowing face.

"Was it you tother night?" she said.

"Sh! Ay, lady," said Alfa, answering and hushing.

"All's well; he's still safe."

"God and his Mother be thanked!"

"I'd ha' comed sooner, but I dussn't. There's a watch set on me."

"I should like to kiss you, angel," said Fortuna, and stepped close up to the hedge.

"I'd sooner ha' your kiss than any but one, but—  
Anudder time!"

Suddenly the head dropped out of sight behind the hedge. Fortuna stood a-tiptoe and looked over. There was nothing to be seen but brown bracken and green gorse. The outlandish beauty of the face, the music of the voice, the happiness of the news, the suddenness of the disappearance did in that disturbance of her thoughts again give them a fancifully superstitious turn. She did not perceive until a minute later a Gipsy on horseback who had ridden up into the road from the western, the Mapple Wells side.

Fortuna got into a way of listening for that low premonitory voicing of "The Hunt is Up." She listened by the hour together when she was making a show of doing something else, reading, sewing, gardening, talking to Press, praying. She listened for it until her weary senses were blunt to distinctions and wrested all kinds of sounds into a likeness to it, the lisp of the wind, the rustle of a leaf, the patter of the rain, the song of a robin, the croak of a raven, even the ill-balanced exchange of words between Press and Bridget in the kitchen. This habit of hers had one great advantage, that it took her out of doors if not out of herself, to the benefit of her health. She would be in the garden and the neighbour-

hood the greater part of the day, at work or walking to and fro. Even the rain did not always keep her in; she would stand by the yew-tree with one of those cumbersome new contrivances called an umbrella over her head; watching the clouds or a flock of peewits or a herd of deer, yes, but always listening. In vain Press foretold all sorts of damage, from a blowzed complexion to a ruined constitution. It was a fine day however and the eve of Christmas when she again heard the song and saw the face over the hedge.

"Good-morning, angel," she said. "You have been long and very long."

"Ay, lady, 't has been very long to me, for I'm heavy with news."

"Of what sort?"

"Good, and very good. But there's bin such a close look-out kep on me by that toad's breed as I couldn't nohow safely come this road. Now Ethan's went off to Mansfield Market and I've gived Zuba the slip; just five dear precious minutes' start I've gotted on her, and we must make the most on't."

"Come round into my garden, angel."

Alfa went round and entered the garden.

"A beggarman was took up at Chesterfield last week. Somebody swore'd he'd seed him over-again Ashover wi' your son Sunday was a fortnit. The beggarman didn't say nay to that. He said your son axed him to show him the road to the moors, and he'd carried him as far as Cocking Tor and left him there. For proof he'd the sixpenny bit on him that the pretty young gentleman had gived him for his trouble."

"And that is all?"

"Not anudder word's been heard on him. But that no news is the best of all news."

"Blessed Mary Mother! But are you sure of the truth of it?"

"Ay, I had it from Dick, Zuba's new husband. He's allus friendly enough wi' me though his coat's as rough as a badger's."

"Sure this is Eden and you are the visiting angel. Let me kiss you." The beautiful face glowed again. "Why do you kneel?"

For Alfa had taken the kiss upon her knees.

"Becos mebbe I shall never be kissed no more by nobody. Now I must be going or——"

"And shall you come again soon?"

"Ay, I shan't go far away whilst this is on. And if I don't Ethan won't; he's tied to me. You shall see me again, lady. But mebbe I shall be hereabouts many a time afore then when you nayther see me nor yet hear me."

"What makes you take so much interest in me?"

"I won't desave you; it's for mysen too." Then she broke out passionately, "No, it's less for mysen than anybody that ever was borned." Suddenly her red passion was colourless again. "Sh! she's here! Make yoursen gethering them hollin berries. Quick!"

Fortuna caught the girl's fear though without any known object, turned to a holly bush close by, and daintily avoiding the prickles began to pluck a twig whereon glowed two or three berries. By which time Alfa, bowing her head, had run the length of the hedge and through the front door. There however she was confronted by Press, gaunt and furious.

"Go back! get out!" said the waiting-woman. "How dare you?"

If Alfa had glowed before, now she blazed, erect.

"Not anudder word!" she exclaimed with a fierceness the fiercer for its compression to a whisper. "Hide me! Or dere'll be debbil's doings."

In sheer amazement as it would seem Press gave way to her low-pitched fury and let her by. The door of the closet under the stairs was open and Alfa darted in. Almost immediately Fortuna showed herself at the door with the berries in her hand and a questioning anxiety on her face.

"I've just been browbet by a minx of a Gipsy," said Press; "and I've bore it. I must be failing."

She seemed to be looking round for the support of a chair. Fortuna did not answer. She caught sight of a Gipsy woman coming up the road, and at once went back into the garden. Next moment Zuba passed the door, coolly alert, with her basket of wares on her head. Her scouting eyes took Press in and she drew up to her. The waiting-woman's back had stiffened; she no longer seemed in need of a chair.

"Good-morning, lady. What can a poor woman like me sell to such a sweet lady as you this fine morning?"

While she spoke her shifting glances searched the doorway and the passage behind, traversed the window, flew aside to the garden, hardly lighted on Fortuna, returned and seemed to have no object but Press, who stood unconciliated, undeceived.

"Look, lady." She brought the basket from her head to her knee. "Here's cups and spoons o' horn, skewers o' dog-wood, clo'es-pegs of ash, platters and trenchers o' beech, mazers o' maple, clogs o' willow, twiggen baskets. What's your need, kind lady? If you want more, sure I'll walk my feet off to fetch it for ye."

Press felt two grudges, one for the force that had been put upon her, the other for this deception that was being tried upon her. She squeezed the two into one and her voice was harsh and uplifted.

"I want nothing fetching," quoth she, "but something taking off; and that's yourself. The sooner the better. I wish all you Gipsy vagabonds was in Nottingham bride-well together. There'd be a proper company in the proper place."

The Gipsy's plausible smile like a transparency let the scowl through with the slightest of changes, so that it was smile and scowl in one.

"I could larn ye worser places than that and further, pretty lady, for to wish them what you mislikes."

"I want no learning, and if I did I wouldn't lower myself to take it from such dirt."

"What a fine delicate-talked lady you are! Anybody can tell as you *are* the lady and not the wench. And yet

even such a great wise lady as yoursen might do worser than peck a grain o' wisdom up out o' the dirt; ay, e'en if you mucked your fine snout a-doing it."

"Do you dare use such abominable filthy language to me, you vagabond trollop?"

"Who the devil are you as I should wash my mouth out afore I talk to ye? Ain't common speech good enough for ye, you tail-wagging curchey-dropping sarving-woman?"

"Get away with you, you low thing! You ain't fit for decent ears to hearken to. Be off with you from my door-step."

"Her door-step, she says! Hahaha! Her door-step's the poorhouse door-step. 'Twas that un she fust comed ower and it's that un she'll cross last. That's a true fortune if I never tell another to my day o' death."

"If you come telling fortunes here, you brazen cheat, you shall be learnt a lesson. The constable was our shoemaker; I'll take him on again and have you whipped at the cart's tail."

"Whipped? Me? Hir mi devlis! Whipped? You would tell more about whipping than me if your back could speak. When you was whipped last, luvni, 'twarn't for truth-telling; I was there and seed you scringe and heerd you skreek. And when you're whipped next, luvni, 'twain't be for truth-telling nayther."

"Be off! Take your beastly vile low-bred gibberish to them as understands it; if anybody at all does; which I don't believe. But if there ain't one other word of good English you know, you bad black woman, there's one you know inside and out, behind and before. Bride-well, wretch. Or if you don't know I'll have you learnt it. Bridewell, wretch!"

And so getting to their shrieks they faced one another, full-blooded tigress and gaunt she-wolf. To listen further would not be edifying. If at first the shrill vociferous Gipsy seemed to have the advantage, she pitched her passion and her voice too high and in time shrieked herself out. Press keeping to a more equable flight of

anger and insult never lost the vigour of either. If ever invention failed her she could always return to the well understood threat of jail, pillory, ducking-stool and whipping-post, an advantage that balanced the Gipsy's command of malignant imagination and esoteric cant. She stood besides on the step and had command of the door and the controversy with power of closure at any moment. With her remained the glory of the last word. Zuba retreated slowly up the road. The victress strode straight to the kitchen, caught Bridget with her ear to the keyhole and gave her something for her listening.

Thereafter she did not quite forget Alfa but put her out of her mind. She supposed that the girl was for some reason afraid of the older Gipsy, and would have taken the opportunity to steal away. After a while, hearing nothing of her, she concluded that she had done so. Fortuna had stood aloof from the clamour of the tongue-battle, indifferent, looking another way. After it had been decided she still remained in the garden, trying to piece together a complete self-deception out of those shreds of news and the brightness of the morning. But when Zuba had passed slowly up the road out of sight she went in, and was confidently told by Press that the young Gipsy minx had gone.

An hour or two later when Fortuna was up-stairs resting, Press had occasion to go to the closet, and found Alfa there seated on the floor in a corner fast asleep. The girl opened her eyes at once and said :

"Has that woman went ?"

"Went ? Ay. And it's high time you was went."

"I didn't get my night rest ; I have been to sleep."

Alfa rose. Her figure was wrapped in the gloom of the closet, but on her face glimmered a dim light which added to its beauty the mystery of a half-revelation. Press was sensible of it though she kicked against it.

"Which road did she go ? More hangs on it than aither you or me."

"If you must know," answered Press grudgingly, "she went up the road."

"Go and see as she's clean cleared off."

"If it'll only help to rid us of you both——"

So saying Press went out into the road, giving her concession the angular appearance of a denial, looked carefully and returned.

"I wish everybody," she said, "was cleared off as clean. What's your call to meddle with our consarns?" She lowered her voice to a fierce whisper. "What's our Mr. Roland to you?"

"Noat. Everyting."

At the door Alfa turned and said, "Thank you."

"You don't owe me no thanks," answered Press grimly.

"For what you've said and done to-day I'll kneel and kiss your feet if you'll let me."

"Then I won't; so don't think it. It shan't never be said of me as I've been domineered by a lickspittle. Shall you be coming again?"

"If I've news to tell."

"Hm."

Alfa was on the move, but turned again and said:

"Who opens the door of a morning?"

"D'ye think 'twould be that snoring lie-abed in the kitchen?"

"Good. If there's a bit of hollin on the step 'twill mean good news; if 'tis a bit o' goss, bad. Then look out for me in the middle o' the next night. And if I don't come, the next to that; until I do come."

"Hm," grunted Press in a sort of unconciliatory consent.

"If 'tain't hollin you needn't say noat to the lady."

"What sort of a stock do you take me for?" said Press.

Then as Alfa slipped away under the garden hedge she returned to the kitchen and took it out of Bridget.

## CHAPTER XXI

### PAYABLE TO BEARER

CHRISTMAS came and the two sisters put off a promised visit to relatives at Hathersage with the standing excuse of the state of the roads. Roland's hair had grown enough to make up for the loss of his wig. He was well enough in body to partake moderately of Mistress Alliott's Christmas pies, plum-puddings, custards and other festive fare. On the last day of the week he affirmed his fitness to travel further; not for the first time, but now with a reasonableness and resolution which his hostesses could not dispute. They only begged a delay until Monday, to be given to the necessary preparations. As well as they could with their scanty information they planned a route through the Peak and West Yorkshire, so that he should avoid the towns and follow in the track neither of the Duke of Cumberland's nor General Wade's army. They lessoned him in the first part of his course, so well known to them, by Spitewinter, Stone Edge, Holymoorside, Watchell and Pudding Pie Hill, where he would enter on the Chesterfield and Manchester road. Particularly they enjoined on him to mark the new road-stone at the cross-roads a little further on and to take the proper direction for Middleton. The delicate question of his finances they advisedly left to the last minute, but having the advantage of position and making full use of it they compelled him to accept the loan of a horse.

They thought of engaging Elijah Bailey to fetch away the horse from the stable while the morning was still dark and to lead it to an agreed-upon waiting-place by the moorside, whence he could serve as Roland's guide to the Chesterfield road. They sent for him on Sunday



night. He came at once and was shown in to Mistress Ann in the chintz room. But instead of waiting to be questioned or commanded he immediately began to speak, as though he had come at his own or—what was the same thing—his wife's impulse.

"Mebbe I should a comed afore, ma'am, but t' Lord left uz to wer own poor guidance."

He put the hand that held his hat behind his back, thus bringing into prominence the other in which was a scrap of soiled paper. As soon as he saw it had caught Mistress Ann's eyes he continued:

"I fun it yesterdee was a sennet unner a goss-bush nigh 'and wheer t' poor lad up-stairs——"

"Sh!" said Mistress Ann, for the old man's voice was high-pitched. "Miss Molly, you mean?"

"Ay, *him*. I bro't it home to Ag thinkin'—I dunna know what thinkin'. At fust Ag says, 'Tis noat; 'tis nubbut a little bit; it conna mane a dale; an' that bit a mucky bit. Thou munna plague t' ladies 'wi' no such trifle.' Then she says, 'I think t' devil '—axin' pardon, ma'am—'is in t' little varmin, od-rabbit it '—axin' pardon again, ma'am. For t' little toäd, ma'am, sempt to be allus a-talkin' at uz; words we couldna quite catch ho'd on. 'Dal t' tweeny mortal,' she says. 'Why do they mak writin' so small an' dree? Why conna they mak it as big's shovels an' shape-hooks,' she says, 'so's onybody could see what it manes?'"

"Quick, Elijah, quick! I've much to do this evening."

"Ay, ma'am, ay, we're a-coomin' to t' quickness presently; but we conna hae't afore we've gotten to't; that's raison; and raison as they says is a good fruit. So at last she says, says Ag—'twere yestreen. Were't yestreen? Ay, 'twere; that is to say if to-dee's Sundee an' yestreen was Saturdee."

"It is so and was so, Elijah. Proceed."

"Good, ma'am, good. I will purceed; with permission. 'Twere yestreen; agreed. She says—what did she say? Dunna trouble yoursen, ma'am, to mak answer; I hae't. She says, 'I'm fair weary o' t' little naggin'

beast; other folk mun abide a spell on him. To-morrer shalt wesh thy face an' scrape thy boots an' goo down to t' hall an' tak it theer, an' whatsumdever they does or says lave it theer.'"

Mistress Ann took the paper from him; though weather-marked the writing on it was perfectly legible. It unfolded itself casually in her hand, and the signature at the foot irresistibly caught her eye. Her face changed; she knew the handwriting; with the help doubtless of the name. But she read no more. With few words she thanked Elijah, though of course unable to say whether his find would prove something or nothing. Then she put half-a-crown into his hand and gave him his orders for the morning.

Said Elijah, "There shall be no mistake unless by t' Lord's good pleasure. I'll meet him wheer I fun him, by t' moor side."

Having dismissed him Mistress Ann shortly gave the history of the paper to her sister and desired her to take it up to their guest. Mistress Alliott was thinking chiefly of tarts and jellies for the light part of their last supper together, but she noticed a something different in Mistress Ann's manner and complexion.

"What is the matter, sister Ann?" she said anxiously. "Is your back any the worse for this change of weather?"

"Perhaps it is a thought the worse, sister."

"You shall take some tar-water to-night, or you'll be having a bout of lumbago. I have much faith in Berkeley."

"Because you have tasted his book but not his remedy."

Then Mistress Alliott took the paper up to Roland and asked if it were aught of his.

"It is, madam," he answered; "'tis a piece of my mother's handwriting. 'Twould be worth five-and-twenty guineas to me if I could get to Nottingham. Now I misdoubt 'twill prove to be worth nothing."

So saying he put it on the table under her eyes.

When Mistress Alliott went down again her sister

saw in her less mobile face somewhat of the same change which had come over her own, but did not ask if the weather had anything to do with it. As usual they left Roland alone for an hour in the evening. Mistress Alliott settled about supper and then sat with her sister in the great oak-panelled parlour. She had the *Lives of the Saints* on the table before her, Mistress Ann had her lighter volume in her hand. Mistress Alliott was rarely loquacious but seldom lapsed into a long interval of silence; unlike Mistress Ann whose volubilities were often succeeded by periods of taciturnity; but that evening the one sat as uncommunicative as the other. The elder indeed often said she talked best with a needle in her hand, but the younger had proved times and times again that she could follow Mr. Pope's ingenuities, Doctor Swift's directnesses or Johnny Gay's frivolities, and yet take her sufficient part in any conversation that was going on. It was however the more patient of the two who tired first. Yet they had been sitting thus quite half an hour before she said:

"It don't want twenty minutes of eight."

And eight o'clock was their supper-time.

Mistress Ann just glanced towards the deliberate clock in the corner, said, "Your eyesight does not differ from mine," and looked back again upon her book.

She understood her sister's meaning perfectly; but if her thoughts were not taking the same direction as her eyes she gave no outward sign of it.

Apparently Mistress Alliott was becoming more impatient; she looked again at the slow clock dribbling out time by half-seconds and found that a bare five minutes had elapsed.

"What book is it, Ann, that you're so vastly interested in?"

She noticed that Mistress Ann had to bethink herself, had to look back surreptitiously at the title-page before she could answer, "*The Fable of the Bees.*"

"That's an old book and by no means one which you much taste, I believe."

"I like it well enough for the time being," said Mistress Ann.

Another pause measured by half-seconds; shorter yet seeming longer than the last. Then Mistress Allott dropping her unusual indirectness said:

"Why don't you speak to me, Ann, about Fortuna Surety?"

"I know no such person, Felicia."

"She is the mother of the young gentleman above-stairs."

"Since you tell me, I know so much about her."

"Don't you take in the obvious connection between Fortuna Surety, Fortuna Bond and Fortuna Chance?"

"Surety and Bond may be near enough related to call cousins legally, but for aught I know Surety and Chance are as strange to each other as heaven and earth."

"Her handwriting exactly tallies, Ann; I've seen it."

"With permission?"

"Certainly."

"You can hardly take it on yourself to say that the permission extends to me."

"How odd you are, Ann, to-night!"

"Hush!"

"Why hush?"

"I thought—the door—— 'Tis nothing."

"You are not vapourish, Ann, nor wont neither to start at somethings, much less nothings."

"Talk as much as you please, sister Allott; it is quite indifferent to me."

"Nay, 'tis your turn, sister Ann. I've shot my bolt."

"Then—'tis—no great matter what you have hit—or missed."

"Surely it makes some sort of difference that this Roland Surety, instead of being an utter stranger, is a nephew of ours of a sort."

"Is't really so? And is the addition in his favour or otherwise?"

"That is according as you take it."

"I? Oh, I haven't taken it at all as yet."

Mistress Alliott read seven slow measured lines of the *Lives of the Saints*; then said in tones as measured and as slow :

"But understand that I do not forgive Fortuna."

"Chance or Bond or Surety?"

"Not the first nor the second nor the third neither."

"Then I suppose that in pure consistency you will not *forgive* this conjectural son of hers?"

"I cannot forgive *her*."

"You do not consider that he favours her?"

"On the whole, no; he takes after the other side. His eyes for instance are blue."

"And what may hers be—if you deign to remember?"

Mistress Alliott did not answer; read a word or two and answered :

"Hazel."

"If by that you mean a greeny brown 'twould make 'em exactly a match with your own."

"You know very well, Ann, that mine are true hazel."

"Also?"

"But I shall never forgive her."

"Such being the irreconcilable variance between one hazel and another? I who have eyes of ordinary grey may look on at the quarrel with an unperturbed indifference."

There was a reading silence for perhaps a minute; it almost seemed that the debate had lapsed. Then Mistress Alliott said :

"Your eyes *are* grey, Ann; but she had just such a pout of the underlip as—you know who; and so has he."

Then Mistress Ann, who had hitherto seemed so unusually cool, all at once took fire.

"You're insulting, sister Alliott," she said. "I have no such foolish pout. And you know it, you know it!"

She rose and walked out of the room. She did not go up to Roland's chamber until she was called to supper. The constraint that rested upon each member of the party during that meal may have been owing to the

consciousness of a near parting. Supper over, Mistress Ann took down the trayful that her sister had brought up. When she returned Roland was apparently in close conversation with Mistress Alliott. He was saying with a frank reserve :

"I never knew my father."

It was evidently all he had to say thereupon, and Mistress Ann remained by the door.

"This seems to be a *tête-à-tête* conversation," said she.

"No, madam," answered he, "I am saying nothing that will not be honoured by your hearing."

"Sir, you speak very courtier-like," said Mistress Ann; but came nearer.

"Our young friend," said her sister, "has just begun telling something about his life which I think should be interesting to both of us."

Mistress Ann sat down somewhat apart, yet where she could see Roland's face. Her chief endeavour was so to keep her gaze upon his eyes that it might not take his lips in. It is noteworthy that both ladies for the time were shy of addressing him by his Christian name, as though the probability of blood-relationship had put him farther from them—or too near to them.

"Your mother," said Mistress Alliott, "in her widowhood will sadly miss your presence."

"My father is not dead," answered Roland with the same candour of reserve as before, closing the subject. "Ay, she will miss me," he continued with a noticeable difference of tone; "and this slobbery weather will keep her indoors. She'll weary of her books and she won't care to sing. If only the sun would shine she could go out into her garden, and the shooting-up of one snow-drop bud would keep her happy maybe for half a day."

"Why do you look so at me, sister Alliott," said Mistress Ann hotly, "as though you knew something by me?"

"I was not looking at you, sister Ann, so far as I am aware, and I know nothing by you. I was just consider-

ing that hardly an hour bygone you too was wishing 'twere gardening weather again."

"Your consideration of which at the present moment is to my mind altogether ill-considered."

Mistress Alliott turned again to Roland.

"I gather that your mother is no more given to housewifery than is my good sister here."

"My mistress here, madam, might be more given and yet very little given. Everything of that sort is left to Press."

Mistress Ann turned a glance her sister's way, a mere flash and back again; but she was caught by Mistress Alliott, who indeed already had her eyes upon her. She seemed angry thereat, and since she could not say what was in her mind said:

"What a dickens, Felicia, moved you to tawder yourself out in that new Hanoverian apron over your old Jacobite filemot paduasoy?"

Said Mistress Alliott without heat, "If you had told me last Sunday that you disliked of it, sister Ann, I would not have worn it again to-day."

"Sure last Sunday it may have become you well enough, sister Felicia, but to-day it looks as vile on you as the Electoral face on an English guinea."

So saying Mistress Ann laughed, and therewith her ill-humour was suddenly dispersed. She took a comforting pinch of snuff, turned to Roland and said:

"Come, Roland, tell us about your mother's harp-playing. What are her favourite tunes? 'The King shall enjoy his own again' and 'Love me little, love me long'?"

"You are a right good guesser, madam," said Roland; "those are some of her chiefest favourites. And she plays the harp too, though I don't think I have said so."

Thus he was encouraged to give them some account of his daily life both indoors and out, which he did with a summary completeness except that he never mentioned Alfa. After the ladies had left him for the night Mistress Alliott went into her sister's room to make sure

that her fire burnt well on the hearth. She took the opportunity to say :

"Well, are you convinced now?"

"By what, pray?" said Mistress Ann.

"Say, by Mistress Press."

"No, faith; there are presses and press-gangs in plenty, but I won't be pressed into anything against my good-will."



## CHAPTER XXII

### CROSS-PURPOSES

It was necessary for Mistress Alliott to rise early in order to prepare Roland's breakfast, but she had understood that her sister's very friendly parting with Roland the night before was final. When therefore Mistress Ann appeared, not in apron and scanty worsted gown, her morning dishabille, but dressed with unusual care, and demanded her share of the meal, she was handsomely scolded for her matutinal imprudence.

"I got up," she answered, "to see what o' the clock it was."

"You could have lain," said her sister, "and listened for the hall clock."

"And to see what weather it was."

"Of which you can see nothing. The only sensible part of your behaviour is that you have put your warm ratteen gown on. But are you sure 'tis well aired?"

"It has been in front of my fire all night."

"Then this folly of yours is not a whim but a plot?"

"A veritable papistical Gunpowder Treason, you may be sure on't."

Breakfast was eaten; during which only Mistress Ann talked with a semblance of liveliness. In exchange for Fortuna's note Mistress Alliott gave Roland guineas in a purse worked by herself. Elijah had fetched away his horse. There remained nothing but to rise, say good-bye and go. Mistress Ann took three pinches of snuff without a break. With some hesitation and much awkward diffidence Roland took Alfa's necklet from his pocket and laid it on the table. The ladies' eyes fastened on it, but they waited for him to speak.

"'Twas given me by a Gipsy girl," he said.

"And what are you doing with a Gipsy's token?" quoth Mistress Ann.

"Nay, madam, 'tis no token." He did not refuse her look for look; he thought her quite ugly with that slovenly scattering of snuff on her upper lip; and gathering colour and courage he gave a spoken answer to her unspoken question. "Or may-be I should not part with it." Quickly the colour cooled from his cheek as he added more deliberately, "But truly nothing was ever less a token."

"I am curious to know it by its right title," said she.

"'Tis—I should say 'tis rightly an alms."

"But these coins would seem to be golden," said Mistress Alliot, "a remarkable gift from such as her to such as you."

"Yes, madam, and far too costly for my acceptance either as a gift or loan. I was about to say that if you would out of your great kindness take charge of it until——"

He stopped; with projected gaze he searched the waste waters of futurity for a dry footing to his hopes.

"Until?"

"I was going to say, 'Until I come back,' but that may be long and she may be in need of it. Yet I mayn't ask you to take any further trouble with it."

"Who is this Gipsy girl that gives such alms?"

He told them briefly what he knew of Alfa, with reservations of course. The heart that does not hide has nothing to hide. For instance he did not mention her youthful offer of marriage nor yet in what manner she had concealed him from his pursuers. Mistress Alliot took the stringed coins in her hand and examined them, coins full-weighted and clean-stamped every one of them. One showed in undebased gold the as yet undegraded features of our eighth Henry, another the likeness of his imperial rival, a third that of some ephemeral Cæsar, a fourth the German profile of the late George; others bore outlandish character, unknown effigies.

Said Mistress Ann, "The fair Bohemians appear even more than their civilized sisters to bring all their havings to the front. I suppose the Gipsy gentleman who weds this Gipsy lady will be considered to have made a rich match of it."

"No," said Roland; and straightway amended it with an emphatic "Yes."

"No, yes?" said Mistress Ann. "What may that mean and not mean?"

"Folks say her father was a sort of king among 'em years bygone, but he had misfortunes, got into debt and lost his position. Now he has been took and pressed for a soldier."

"So much for the no."

Roland felt challenged to speak up for the yes.

"She's a brave honest generous pure girl. I should think that's something better than a few more coins."

Said Mistress Ann with the promptitude of a consecutive remark, "I don't quite understand how your Gipsy so completely hid you from the constables in that small tent."

"There was some bedding on the floor; I lay down on it and she covered me up."

"But surely they would notice such a heap and demand to see into it?"

Roland knew he was being cornered, but that only angered him into a more stubborn resolution.

"She lay down too, as though she was sick."

"And they took two for one? There must have been mighty close approximation."

Roland flushed and flashed.

"I could feel her heart beat."

"A very pretty proof."

"Enough, Ann," said Mistress Alliott. Her eyes, hazel or greeny-brown, were humid though her eyelashes were dry. She put the necklet into her pocket as though to hide controversy away. "If you will tell me where and how I can find Alfa, I will contrive that 'tis safely returned to her."

"You are strangely kind, madam," said he.

"I am strangely tempted to be kind, son."

Then the lashes too were wetted from the eyes, discreetly, undemonstratively.

"'Tis hard to tell of their whereabouts, they are a wandering people; but for the last two or three years they have never been long away from some part or other of the forest and its neighbourhood."

"Especially that part," said Mistress Ann, "contiguous to Mr. Roland Surety's abode?"

"They are often our way."

"I'll warrant you. And that—what do you call her? Alfie or Betty?—you'd wed that black huzzy?"

In truth such a thought had only taken the shape of a dream within him as she snapped and questioned. He answered with a flush and a frown:

"I'll wed no huzzy, madam, black or white."

"So you have given her promotion already in your heart."

He hardly heeded; what was occupying him just then was the bright beckoning vision of Alfa backed by the sombre promise of the future.

"But may-be I shall never come back," he said.

"You know you're bent on coming back," said she.

"And if I did——"

"Did I not say?"

"She would not receive me. Her last words were to bid me never see her again."

"Hut-tut! A weighty confirmation!"

It was to Roland like a peep of sun let in on a gloomy landscape.

"Think you she didn't mean it?" he asked.

But Mistress Ann turned away; she perceived that her gibes were but stinging his hopes into activity. Mistress Allcott checked his further questioning.

"'Tis nigh on daybreak," she said. "Son, 'tis high time you was on your way."

She had insisted on adding to his equipment riding-boots, great-coat and shammy gloves which had be-

longed to her late husband. It was but putting them on and he was ready. Heart-full he stammered thanks. Mistress Ann, who had cooled back into kindness, put into his hands a double-barrelled pistol, silver-mounted and of fine workmanship, together with a pouch full of powder and shot, and just said :

"It is ready loaded."

"I'm ashamed, ladies," he said, "to be so short of my manners. I've no proper answer to make to your exceeding kindness."

"There's no call, son," said Mistress Alliott, "either for shame or words."

"It will be very unsafe for you to correspond direct with your mother," said Mistress Ann, "but whatever you consign for her to my care I will see that it goes to her hand."

Tears were in Roland's eyes.

"I take it very kindly of you," he said.

"But Roland Surety will be a perilous subscription; you had better put your letters over the signature of—say Robert Simpson."

Roland attempted to express the depth of his gratitude by the lowness of his bow, and would have kissed Mistress Ann's hand.

"Nay," said she, "you did not part from your Gipsy so ceremoniously, I'll be bound for't."

Roland blushed.

"There was a greater distance 'tween us, madam," he said, "than there is 'tween you and me."

"But kinder looks to bridge that distance. Come, child, and fear not." She offered him her cheek. "'Tis the tongue that is dangerous at my age, not the cheek; and I swear my tongue to keep the peace for the next twelvemonth."

He kissed her cheek and likewise Mistress Alliott's. The elder lady went first to see that the way was clear. Mistress Ann took his hand and guided him down-stairs without a candle. It was still quite dark in the house, but from somewhere in the rear came the deadened sound

of serving-men's voices and one of the maids in the kitchen was singing "Phillida flouts me"; to which the stable-boy in the yard was whistling accompaniment. The door was already unbolted; Mistress Alliott opened it quietly and let him out without another word. They heard the crackle of the rimy herbage as he walked stealthily across the lawn, heard the chink of the gate as he let himself through, heard the muffled sound of his first few steps, then heard nothing but Jack still whistling and Fan singing conclusively—

"Since 'twill no better be,  
I'll bear it patiently. •  
Yet all the world may see,  
Phillida flouts me."

Mistress Alliott went up to his chamber and locked the door; then betook herself to the servants' quarters and was immediately thick in her household duties. A minute later Mistress Ann, who did not visit the still-room once in a twelvemonth, found her there inspecting a jar of syrup of clove-gillyflowers and put a five-pound-note into her hand, saying :

"Miss Molly's vales to the servants."

"This is too much, Nan," said Mistress Alliott.

"'Tis too late to tell her that. I believe she wanted them to have something handsomer to wag their tongues about than her sudden departure. They need not know before night. But what about Mr. Roland? Are you satisfied?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I know you are dissatisfied."

"I have not expressed my dissatisfaction."

"Then I take you to task for your slowness of expression."

"But I really han't——"

"For my part I don't wrap it up. I'm vexed to the blood by that strayed young man's infatuation for the Gipsy. Otherwise I would have ridden with him as far as Hathersage. He could have taken a bed there."

"With his mother's kindred?"

"They have no reason to be ashamed of him."

"Indeed you owe them a visit; but he will travel faster alone."

"One disadvantage; against which I set a thousand advantages in our cousin's advice and help."

"Doubtless—if—but——"

"There's no time for balancing ifs and buts."

"'Tis too late to overtake him, and at the same time too early an hour for your health."

"Oh, I shall gain a mile or two by going the nearer way through Asher."

"But you must not dream of starting before the sun has warmed the air a little."

"My back is quite well again. Your tar-water has worked wonders. For that matter I shall only be going up to meet the sun instead of waiting for it down here. And you know 'twill be vastly less humid on the moor than here in the valley."

Mistress Ann thereupon left the room, before her sister could enforce her old objection or advance a new one. Probably Mistress Alliott thought there was no need of haste in doing either; a lady's travelling preparations even for a short half-day's ride are usually the business of hours rather than minutes. Pondering remonstrances the while she proceeded to decant a portion of the syrup into a jug, tied the cover on the jar again and put it back into its place; selected a pot of quince marmalade and took it to the cook in the kitchen; a deliberate five minutes' work. But as she came out into the hall ripe for dissuasion, Mistress Ann descended the stairs booted, hooded, furred; her joseph or riding-habit buttoned down to the hem of the skirt. If it had all been done impromptu it was a feat of quick-change dressing worthy of record. Behind her, carrying her muff, gloves and black velvet loo-mask, waddled Thomasin her chamber-woman, who being but young-old and pursy was puffing-red with the haste she had made. Mistress Alliott perceived that early as it

was by the clock it was too late in the day for dissuasion.

"I fear, sister Ann," she said, "that this hurry has over-heated you for a journey. I wish you had allowed me to assist you."

"Sister Felicia," said Mistress Ann, "you are extreme good. I will trouble you to tie my mask on for me. Thomasin has but just breath left to get her safe to the next chair."

"Ma'am," said Thomasin, "I've breath enoo—for to do—all a waiting-woman's duties."

"But none for prating of 'em, Thomasin."

Mistress Alllott took the loo-mask but did not tie.

"'Tis but a small protection against the morning air," she said. At which moment they heard the tramp of horses coming round to the front. "Why did you not tell me last night that you was bent on going?"

"I was waiting to see how the tar-water acted," said Mistress Ann. "Besides I knew you'd be as violent prophetic against it as Jeremiah and Ezekiel in one."

Thomasin opened the door to the pale rimy morning. Dimly through the fog appeared two grooms, one on a stout brown with a pillion, the other on a lighter hack bearing saddle-bags crammed with a lady's necessities. Mistress Ann addressed the latter.

"Thomas, you are to ride for Hathersage as fast as you can without distressing Pip. You will presently overtake a young gentleman on Robin. Stop him and say that I am coming up behind and beg the favour of his company and protection as far as our roads run together. Ride on at once; Thomasin must help me up. Thomasin!"

William Drew had brought the double horse to the mounting block; but Thomasin was so deep in trying to connect the young gentleman on Robin with Miss Molly's misfortune, that she did not hear her mistress. Mistress Alllott meanwhile had taken the muff of feathers and lace from the waiting-woman and gone off with it and the loo-mask. She now returned bearing a whole



mask and a huge bear-skin muff, which she compelled Mistress Ann to take in exchange for the smaller and more fashionable articles. She herself slung the one about her sister's neck and tied the other round her waist. Then the sisters tenderly kissed and spoke their formal farewells.

"I trust you will arrive safely, sister, before nightfall."

"Thank you kindly, sister. I shall not be absent from you more than two nights."

"Make my loving compliments to our cousins. Tell little Lettice I have a baby for her, which I will send at the first opportunity."

"I will not fail."

"And be sure to give the chamber-maid half-a-crown and whisper her to put the fire in your chamber betimes and to have the sheets well aired."

Then Thomasin at the second bidding came forward and helped her mistress to mount.

The fog, though not thick, was sufficient to defeat the spiritless light of the yet unrisen sun. Even near things seemed to stand off and wear an air of unreality, like phantoms afraid of the approach of day. The cliff by which they rode towered above them, unmaterialized, topless, like an austere dream impending an awakening. But soon turning therefrom they forded the little river and passed by Ashover, of which the very houses, every stone of them, seemed to be fancy-built, presently to dissolve and disappear. They saw the semblance of but one man, and he having come barely out of nothingness went back into it like an inhabitant of sleep-land. But as they ascended the valley towards Kelstedge, the fog thinned about them and the light took more and more of the colour of day. A thick hoar-frost covered the grass along the margin of the stream so that only a delicate green tinge showed through. It clad the leafless trees with a white foliage, rendering clearly distinguishable the simple arrangement of the polled willows, the fineness of the birch, the closeness of the thorn, the graceful intricacy of the beech, the knotted

twists of the oak and the ash-tree with its boughs up-bent like the branches of a huge candelabrum.

At Kelstedge they turned into the Chesterfield road and soon rose out of the valley to the high level of the moor. The sun came forth, at first pale and undefined, then red and round. There was a peevish sort of breeze hissing thinly among the heather. Though not strong it had a sidling way of biting or rather pecking, which made Mistress Ann put on her mask and William turn up the collar of his wrap-rascal. Right and left there was nothing but heather, its grey gloom only qualified by the whiteness of the hoar-frost, which however did not lie as thick as in the valley. Mistress Ann was ever looking anxiously ahead but saw nothing either of Thomas or Roland, not even after she had passed the highest point of the road by Spitewinter and begun to descend. On her right was the green vale of the Rother still veiled in mist, and beyond that the woods of Wingerworth dimly visible; and there or thereabouts, if she could have seen him, was Roland.

He had found Elijah by the moor side, had received from him the horse and its well-stuffed saddle-bags and had been seen by him on to the Chesterfield road. But he went wrong half a mile past Kelstedge and did not discover his mistake until, as we have said, he was near Wingerworth, a village three miles from Chesterfield. He stopped a rustic by the park side and asked to be put right for the Manchester road. The breeze there was a mere shiver in the air, but the rime fell ceaselessly from the trees with a sharp thin rustle. From the bumpkin, who probably meant to send him by Rowsley and Buxton, he received such an intricacy of direction, such a medley of straight-forrards, right and left, that in an hour's time he found himself looking down again on Ashover from Far Hill.

Thomas, unintelligently obedient to command, rode on to Hathersage. Mistress Ann followed with an ever-increasing anxiety, and passing through Holymoorside and Watchel gained the Chesterfield and Manchester

highway; but at the cross-roads, a mile further on, she bade William turn back.

Said William still jogging on, "Ma'am, we'd better let t' young gentleman goo his own gate and mak haste to Hathersage whilst we may. If I know oat it'll non be daylight in t' dale two hours after noon."

"I stand responsible for the daylight, William. Do you as I bid."

"We're nayther on's feather-weights, ma'am. I dunna considy Linnet up to more nor twenty mile o' roads like thisn."

"Being I'm responsible for the day, William, 'twill be but a small addition to be responsible for Linnet also."

"Quallity taks a dale on theirsens. If mony on 'em gets accepted above, Lord A'mighty mun hae a shackling time on't."

"Turn again at once."

"Madam said we was to rive safe afore neet."

"When I speak, William, you must hear nobody else in the world."

"Then, ma'am, being so light o' hearing it'll behoove me to keep my ears builded up."

"Turn, William."

So at last he turned with a very ill grace, saying:

"Yo unnerstan', ma'am, I dunna advise it?"

"Perfectly. Now ply your heel and rest your tongue with whatever faculty is at the back of it."

They returned, inquiring by the way and hearing no news of Roland though some of Thomas, especially at Holymoorside where the groom had stopped at the inn for a can. The landlady was quite sure that nothing either on two legs or four had passed that day without her knowing; which opinion the landlord backed with his oath. Mistress Ann gave the landlady Roland's description, and leaving her to use her keen eyesight upon it bade William push on towards Chesterfield. He did so with surprising cheerfulness, saying:

"Mebbe I ought to say, 'Stop here, ma'am, and bait t' poor mare.' But there's better inns at Chesterfield, lass. That'll mak amends."

But his hopes of pot and pipe and a snug seat in the ingle nook of a Chesterfield inn were woefully disappointed, when his mistress losing hope of meeting Roland in that direction again ordered him to turn back.

Still keeping his mortified countenance eastward, "We're not above a mile from Chesterfield," quoth he, "and 'tis a danged dree sixteen to Hathersage."

"Cease making a show of your geographical learning and turn back, William," said his mistress.

"Ma'am, I wish yo'd tak t' poor mare's opinion on't."

"I might, if I were not already surfeited with poor William's poor opinions. For the second if not the third time, William, I bid you turn."

The tone of her bidding warned William that it would not be prudent to prolong his disobedience; but as he pulled the mare's head round he muttered:

"If I'd knowed we was gooin' a-hunting, young gentlemen by scent, I'd a gone and borrowed two or three leash o' hounds for to bring wi' uz."

They returned to the inn at Holymoorside and baited there. But while William was realizing his dream of pot and pipe, warm ingle and cold beef, Roland rode by and to his surprise was stopped in the name of Mistress Ann Chance. She came out to him and briefly explained.

"We have cousins at Hathersage, and as I owe them a visit it occurred to us that I should do well with your permission to avail myself of your protection thither." After even so short an experience of that region Roland was right glad to have her friendly company and guidance. He declined her offer of refreshment. "Then we will mount at once and hasten on whilst we can see. We are not afraid of highwaymen in our poor country, but I do not at all relish the being benighted on these moors."

William's repast was cut short, to his increasing ill-humour. They set off again, and striving to make up for lost time hastened on as fast as the nature of the ground permitted. Still as they travelled westward beyond the cross-roads the country became wilder

and more desolate. The grass-grown track they followed was hardly separable from the swampy moor, which extended to the horizon on every side a thousand feet above the sea; an expanse of one dusky tone in which were merged the wintry differences of grey and brown and green, of heather, bracken and rank grass or rush. Roland rode by Mistress Ann's side, and was as usual a very good listener to her abundant talk.

At last the road which for mile after mile had been at one level dipped a little and a valley began to open out before them backed by dim dark hills. Over these the sun hung like a red-hot coal, but they were untouched by the rosy influence which suffused the surrounding air. Perhaps Mistress Ann did not see; she was at the time making merry over a funny peculiarity of the Duke of Devonshire's in the nicknaming of his daughters. William pulled his off rein and turned from the descending road to slightly rising ground, along which may-be there ran some rough kind of a track, may-be not. Presently Mistress Ann left talking of Chatsworth and said:

"I cannot at all make our situation out."

William said nothing, Roland had nothing to say. They were then riding along an almost level stretch of fine turf. On their right was the moor bounded a mile away by an abrupt up-swelling of the ground, on their left a boulder-strewn ridge, the brink of the valley that they had just had a glimpse of.

"I should have thought," she said again, "that we ought by now to be going down. And what are these rocks?"

William only rode the faster. There being still no reply she put the straight question:

"Where are we, William?"

"I thou't yo knowed, ma'am," answered William.

"If I did, why should I ask?"

"Oh, just for to see if I knowed, ma'am."

"That being so, still why don't you answer?"

"Becos, ma'am, I know yo know I know."

"Where are we?"

"Atop o' Curbar Edge, ma'am; if yo dunna know."

"Curbar Edge? And why not descending into Curbar?"

"I knowed it ud be a sight lighter up here nor down in t' dale; so I'm framing to get on to t' Sheffield road by Fox House."

"'Tis a vile horrid road. You ought not to have varied the direction without consulting me."

"I knowed, ma'am, yo'd be again it."

"Then your folly was insolence. Take us down into the dale by the nearest road."

"That'll be straight ower t' edge."

"The nearest practicable road, if you please."

"That'll be by Froggatt of coorse; but I dunna know——"

"Take us then by Froggatt, and cease prating."

William did his mistress's bidding sulkily, silently. Still on their right was the moor, and close by on their left the precipice rudely bordered with huge boulders and fragments of rock; as though demigods of yore had thrown down into line the materials for a parapet and then tired of the work. The valley bottom was covered with mist, out of which came the roar of an unseen river, and above which darkly uprose the opposite heights, not easily separable from the narrow band of cloud that lined that horizon. Clear of the cloud hung the rose-red sun, still lord of the sky. Roland seemed to be looking that way, which made Mistress Ann say to him:

"Can you see Eyam church steeple? I can. That hill opposite with the black shadow on it like a mourning cloak is Eyam moor."

She rose out of her anger and began to take an interest in naming the different landmarks, especially the heights that overlooked Hathersage, Higgar Tor, Stanage Edge and Bamford moor. Roland thought to himself:

"'Tis my mother's country; and mine."

Higher up the valley and apparently closing it in was a dim cone, to which Mistress Ann gave the name of Win Hill.

"'Tis a good successful name," said Roland, and approved of the omen.

"You shall see it nearer to-morrow," said Mistress Ann.

They had yet a descending mile of rough riding, then with a sharp leftward turn they began to pass under the precipice whose brink they had been skirting. It was but a narrow track between a ravine, whose depth was hidden in mist, and a boulder-strewn steep which as the road descended reared itself ever higher until its stony jagged brow took a cliff-like perpendicularity, fantastically battlemented like some gigantic architectural nightmare.

"Oh lud, William!" exclaimed Mistress Ann, "don't go so near the edge."

"I mun goo where t' road taks me, ma'am," said William; "sin this is the road yo've chose."

The sun touched the cloud, dipped a little into it, seemed nowise lessened, suddenly was a quarter, was half gone. It glowed, half in, half out; was submerged but glowed through for a minute like an expiring fire, then disappeared. The road became steeper; the mare slipped in treading on a loose stone.

"Oh, do take care, William," said Mistress Ann.

"I conna tak more nor I con," answered William.

As they descended the fog thickened.

"It grows fearfully dark," said Mistress Ann.

"What did I tell ye, ma'am?"

"Where are we now, William?"

"I conna say. I knowed summat when I were on top in t' leet."

Soon a dim light or two, a dog's bark, a child's cry showed that they were passing through a small village.

"Are we to goo on to Curbar, ma'am?" asked William.

"Why to Curbar?"

"'Twill be nobbut another two mile out o' t' road."

"I think we have gone far enough out already."

"Glad yo're satisfied, ma'am. I nobbut wanted to mak sure on't."

They went at a foot's pace through the solid dark, and by good luck happened right on Froggatt bridge. As they crossed it they saw up on the highway, two furlongs in front of them, the flicker of many lights which seemed to betoken the rapid passage of a numerous cavalcade. William and Roland holloaed but without drawing their attention. They would have holloaed louder if they had known that it was a search-party from Hathersage on the look-out for them. The meeting was just missed through William leaving the proper road by Curbar.

"Anyhow," said Mistress Ann, putting a colour of cheerfulness on her words, "we shall now have the voice of the Derwent for company."

Said William, "I'd sooner hae t' voice o' John Howe t' butler."

He would have had his mistress stop for the night at Stoke Hall.

"What," she said, "and lie in a Hanoverian bed? Fie, William! 'Twould be worse than damp sheets; 'twould give me the rheumatism in my principles as well as my back."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, as yo're so weakly i' both them two plazen."

At Grindleford the fire-lit window of a little mug-house looked cheerfully out on the dark, and the merry squeak of a bagpipe was heard within. William came to a stand.

"Move on," said his mistress.

"A good fire," quoth he, "good ale, good fellowship——"

"And bad everything else."

"I'd be content wi' worse, ma'am."

"You have worse; be content. After all 'tis but three miles."

"I' them three mile we shall goo wrong."

"You talk like a Jeremiah, William."



"No, ma'am, I talk like a person o' sense."

A little further on, "Take your hat off, child," said Mistress Ann.

Roland did so, but asked the reason for it.

"We are passing the spot sacred to our martyrs of Padley."

"Dunna talk on 'em, ma'am," said William, "when we may all on 's be martyrs afore another minute."

"You are one already, William," said Mistress Ann; "so that's past praying for."

Then she told the story of the Padley martyrs.

Whether a Jeremiah or no, William was a true prophet as well as a martyr. A quarter of an hour later he said in a told-you-so tone:

"We've missed of Hazleford brig, ma'am; and we've lost t' Darrent."<sup>1</sup>

"Then turn back, William."

"I dunna know enoo to know which is back."

"Then keep on."

After a while they met a man carrying a lantern, who told them they were at Offerton. William proposed that they should put themselves upon the ready hospitality of Mistress Ann's brother-in-law, Squire Eyre of Highlow, which was only a mile away and on the same safe side of the river.

"No," said Mistress Ann, "they are expecting us at Hathersage."

The man guided them to the ford and held the light while the pillioned horse waded across; then in answer to Roland's offer of payment said, "Yo're varry welcōm. Good-neet," and in a second or two was out of sight, light and all.

"One o' them wild savage Peakkrills, I'll tak my oath on't," said William. "There's summat mortal wrong at bottom if a mon wunna tak money when 'tis offered."

<sup>1</sup> Derwent.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

"ARE we on the right road now, William?" said Mistress Ann presently.

"Ay, ma'am, 'tis t' reet road."

"Did you remember to turn to the right?"

"Ay, I remembered; but whether I did it or no's more nor I can say."

"Then turn at once."

He turned without a word, an ominous docility, which made his mistress anxiously ask him if he were sure he had not turned.

"I'm sure o' noat, ma'am," he said. "Dang me if I dunna belave this danged mist has gotten into my brains."

"Heaven pity us, William, if your brains fail us."

"Yo may say so, ma'am."

But a quarter of an hour's riding seemed to bring them no nearer to Hathersage. All at once they heard the river close by, crossing their road under the horses' feet.

"What's this?" said Mistress Ann.

"The Darrent," said William. "If I'd ruled we shouldna a bin here. We shall look well, fecks, if we step into t' river and be drowned in a twirl-hole. And a sorry well an' all."

"Hold your tongue, sirrah. Where are we?"

"Mun I answer or mun I ho'd my tongue? I conna do both."

"Answer at once."

"Mebbe we're on Mytham brig, mebbe we're on Hazleford brig, mebbe we're somewheer else."

"What have we here?" said Roland.

For some thing or things seemed to be rising out of the ground or issuing from the mist, and before apprehension had time to take shape or opposition to rank itself, the two men felt themselves seized by palpable hands belonging to phantom bodies. Cried Mistress Ann in a loud clear voice:

"Who are you? What do you intend?"

Immediately a hand was put over her mouth and she was lifted out of the pillion by a strong pair of arms. Roland having got one leg free for a moment kicked out, not in vain apparently, for there was a vocal response, hearty and guttural, though brief and neither loud nor divisible into words. He was dragged from his seat and pinioned with a practised dexterity. His attempt at remonstrance or reproach was promptly and roughly stopped by the tight bandage of his own neckerchief over his mouth. Drew through his greater weight made a somewhat longer resistance and came with the more force to the ground, where he lay half stunned.

Their captors' purpose seemed to be plunder. Roland felt a rude handling of one and another of his pockets, but before he had lost anything a sound like a peewit's wail came from a distance. Straightway with wonderful strength and quickness Roland and the serving-man were hoisted on to one of the horses and jointly secured there by the reins, which were unbuckled and fastened tightly round both their bodies. Mistress Ann was lifted back into her pillion, and Drew's place before her was taken by one of those silent mysterious shapes. It seemed impossible to resist, dangerous to cry out. William just said, "We should a bin better at Grinleford Brig to my manner o' thinking," and a blow over his mouth that drew blood advised him into silence.

Then they were put into motion, the horses and that accompaniment of flitting shapes, over the river and onward, at first quietly and gently, but soon at what seemed a reckless speed under the circumstances, yet without mishap, as though their conductors had cats'

eyes for the dark. Sometimes they went through smooth places but more often rough, where the horses' hoofs struck the hard or sank into the soft, but never so far as could be seen did they pass a human habitation. For maybe half an hour they suffered from that enforced locomotion, in which nothing seemed real but the bodily discomfort. Even their terror was a shapeless tongueless brat of the dark. At length they stopped. Roland and Drew were released from their joint bondage and made to dismount, Mistress Ann was lifted down. They all walked a few paces without a word, urged only by push and pull. Then the ground seemed to open to them, a narrow gap through which the men were thrust and drawn, and thence slid, stumbled, plunged down a short rough incline to level standing, losing skin by the way on hands and elbows, knees and shins. Mistress Ann followed them with gentler compulsion.

The darkness into which they had then passed needs some other name, gross, earthy. They breathed the damp air of a dungeon pungently qualified by the smell of peat smoke. They heard the constant dripping of water on every side. The estoppel was taken from the tongues of their kidnappers and there was a sudden babel of strange sounds, which had a wild music of their own but to those unaccustomed ears seemed an uncouth gibberish. A turf which smouldered unseen in the midst was fanned into a glow, fuel was applied, and in a little while flames shot up filling the air with an obscure mixture of smoke and red blaze. Whereby the captives saw to their dismay that they were underground and in the power of a gang of wild "petticoat-men" some dozen in number.

The reputation of these as marauders and murderers had gone before them, and their appearance did not wrong their reputation. Such a union of the savage and squalid those comfortable English folk had never beheld. Bare-legged and footed every one, and mostly bare-headed but for a thatch of unkempt hair, they seemed properly to have but two tattered garments apiece, a

petticoat reaching to the big-boned knee and a scanty plaid thrown over the shoulders; though some wore the burlesque addition of a furbelowed scarf, an English soldier's red coat, a lady's embroidered smock of fine linen, a dandy's velvet waistcoat or gold-laced hat. But of antiquated arms, claymores or mere basket-hilted swords, round targes, daggers and knives, they seemed to have a very arsenal, though they possessed but one fowling-piece and two or three metal-handled pistols among them. Moreover an unadulterated manhood sat upon every one of them, with a naturalness of movement and attitude, a perfect understanding between themselves and such weapons as they carried, which prevented the total result from being at all ridiculous or wholly disgusting.

Their doings were almost as ferocious as their appearance. In a trice they had thrown themselves upon their two male prisoners and rifled their pockets and pouches. The few shillings and the Sheffield shut-knife found on William's person appeared to give abundant satisfaction, still more the pistols and pouches of powder and shot. Roland's brandy flask was passed from mouth to mouth and eagerly drained, but over his twenty-five guineas they raised a pæan of self-gratulation, an uncouth mixture of the shrill and guttural. As wild were their gestures as their utterances, and one overjoyed cateran leapt so high that his head struck the roof of the cave; which fetched him to the ground again prematurely but with unimpaired content.

Next some of them turned their attention to Mistress Ann. With barbarous speech but easily understandable signs they demanded her earrings but allowed her to remove them herself. They had the craft to make her produce her purse, unglove her hands and give up her rings, but their greed went no further and they did not themselves touch her with a finger. Others in the meantime had unloosed the thongs which bound Roland and Drew. That done, a dozen hands at once ripped their clothes from them, with such hasty violence that all the

booty suffered, and William's shirt and Roland's waistcoat were torn to shreds. The serving-man was stripped to the breeches, which would doubtless have gone too but for the lady's presence. Roland, perhaps out of consideration for his golden spoil, had not lost his shirt, when Mistress Ann, somewhat reassured by her personal exemption, stood forth in his defence.

"Gentlemen!" she cried, "listen to me, gentlemen! I beg some consideration for this young gentleman."

She was thrice happy in her exordium; there was one word in it, and probably but one, which was understood by her audience. Their clamours stilled, they passed it by mouth from one to another, "Shentlemans!" with a sedate and dignified approbation; then showed themselves prepared to listen further.

"I assume, gentlemen, that you are faithful adherents of the cause of our rightful sovereign. So am I; so is this young gentleman, who is even now on the way to join His Royal Highness's army in your country. I claim that as loyal subjects you allow him to proceed thither in peace. In proof that I am not deceiving you—if you could see my heart you would need no proof—but in proof, see this!"

She took Roland's hat from the cateran who held it but made little or no resistance, produced the white cockade still concealed within, pinned it to the upturned brim and set it on the young man's head. The Highlanders raised a shout, nay, a scream, warlike, piercing, simultaneous, the very archetype of a battle-cry, a surprising volume of sound to come from so few throats. When that ceased there was a call, probably of some unseizable name. Thereupon one of them stepped a little forward, the rest making room for him, a man conspicuously tall and strong, with a sword at his back nearly as long as himself, but neither in that nor otherwise was his equipment distinguishable from the others'. With a dignity which a huge shock head of flaming red hair and what seemed to his hearers a barbaric jargon could not degrade, he answered the lady at

considerable length, using much gesticulatory eloquence. After which there was a consultation among the caterans in eager abrupt sentences, half-a-dozen speaking at once, with apparently much difference of opinion. The orator remained talking at the last, and apparently had his own way or part of it. Anyhow Roland's clothes were restored to him, all but a gay neckcloth, which the raggedest tatterdemalion of them all had twisted askew round his own bull's neck and could not be persuaded to give up. Also in the ebullition of their dynastic enthusiasm they forgot to return the gold.

"But what mun I do, ma'am?" said William Drew piteously. "I'm fafr ashamed to speak to ye. I'm co'd an' all."

His mistress pleaded for him too, but perhaps with less zeal, certainly with less effect. All she could get him returned was a pair of knitted garters; only the Highlandman who had carried off his decent livery coat tossed him his own discarded plaid, a filthy sodden collection of rags that but just hung together. William indignantly refused it.

"It's alive!" he said. "I wouldna touch it with a twenty-foot pole."

"Take this," said Roland, offering him the late Mr. Alliott's great-coat; "I am warm enough without it."

Indeed their captors had not spared to feed the fire from a heap of peat, heather and green wood in the cave. The dense smoke had no outlet but by the narrow slit of an entrance. It took no effect on the hardened Highlanders but made the English three cough and gasp, now that they were freed from the most pressing of their anxieties. They were forced to retire to the far end of the cave, where they found that they could just breathe. The floor of that part of the cave was covered with a heap of loose stones, which was carelessly strewn with heather probably for the Highlandmen's bedding; and thus it not only raised them above the soft wet ground but provided them with some sort of seat or couch, as they would have it. The width of the cavern, some three

paces, was almost taken up by the fire; its dark extremities were perhaps separated from each other by five times as much. The irregularly sloping roof reached some considerable height in the middle, but behind their backs it almost met the floor.

Of the north-countrymen two or three busied themselves with preparations for a meal, which were simple enough, namely to hang a bloody rough-dressed half-carcase of mutton over the fire by means of a chain and two stakes; the others lay or crouched against the wall on each side of the blaze, apparently indifferent to the hardness or dampness of their resting-places.

Roland sat with his back to the moist rock, regretting the loss of his pistols and revolving wild boyish schemes of rescue and escape. William was taken up with the difficulty of breathing and the loss of five shillings and a groat, his wrap-rascal and the better part of a suit of clothes. His mistress in spite of her apprehensions made some use of her eyes, though they were sorely smoke-galled.

"Did you ever see so wild a scene?" she said to Roland.

"I wish the way out on't was not so high up," said Roland, who was in the middle of an undetailed dream of a dash for liberty.

A scene wild indeed! The bonfire hissed or crackled, more smoke than flame. Weird shapes of men flitted through the reek, hardly more real than their huge fantastic shadows which fled across the dim walls. Others lay about in nature's own attitudes, and the steam from their moist raiment mixed with the general fume. One sat and warmed his hands and gazed into the fire, as though he saw visions in it; three disputed together loud and volubly in their strange tongue with unrestrained gesturing; another was stretched all his length in sleep and snored Gaelic. The cooking flesh spluttered, water ever dripped from the roof, the bonfire crackled or hissed; and the wavering shadows, the flickering flames, the



writhing smoke seemed as much alive as those uncertain human forms.

When the mutton was sufficiently done for the cooks' impatient appetites, that is to say, part burnt and part raw, they slashed and hacked it to pieces with their knives. First they offered Mistress Ann a portion, doubtless of the choicest, on the point of a dirk; but besides that the greasy mixture of charred and bleeding was not exactly appetizing, she gave way to a little secret feminine shudder at the near sight of that murderous tool, and could not help wondering to what use it had been put before its conversion to table cutlery. So she declined, and after much search some broken victuals from Roland's saddle-bag were served up to her, the wing of a goose and a scrap of plum-cake, the rest it would seem having gone down the cavernous gullets of the marauders. Since there was nothing better for him, Roland was fain to accept a morsel of their least fat and best done without accompaniment of bread; vegetable or salt; but William Drew turned his face to the wall and preferred his hunger to a diet so barbarously carnivorous. The Highlanders refused neither blood-red nor cinder-black. The fire had fallen, and was almost hidden under the fresh fuel which had been heaped upon it. Through the dun atmosphere came and went the flicker of a tongue of flame, the glimmer of a man's hand or face, now and again the gleam of steel.

Two of the freebooters having satisfied their appetites went forth, and their places were immediately taken by another two from without, a proof that they did not take their ease so confidently without keeping a good watch. With the help of the newcomers everything was eaten up to the bare bone. Then where they had sat or crouched they lay down and slept.

Of their prisoners William was the first to go off in spite of his complaints of cold and hunger, hardness and wetness. Roland did what he could for Mistress Ann's comfort in choosing the driest and most even place for her couch and spreading it with heather. He and she lay

awhile talking in low tones of their position and future. But his replies grew infrequent, incoherent, he got thinking out a plan of escape. Then just when he had proved to himself that it was as practicable as it was heroic, he fell asleep. For a while the fire kept her company, but at length it too slept and she was alone in her wakefulness. Or if she dozed once and again her brief and broken slumbers were vexed as much with bad dreams as her long periods of watching were with bad realities—with numbed limbs and icy back, with the pungent smoke, with the loud snoring of the gorged freebooters; with William's complaints which never failed when he woke for a minute to turn over, to remove a sharp stone that pressed into his ribs or to put back a stalk of heather that inconvenienced his eyes and nose; with confused repetitions of to-day and exaggerated fears for the morrow; with surmises, vain, inconsistent, irrational, impossible, in explanation of their present situation.

Yet her wildest surmise hardly strained credulity more than would have done an exact recital of the freebooters' adventures, which never properly set down are now put away past recovery in the lumber-room of forgetfulness. Thus much however dimly appears: On the day after the prince's arrival at Derby a handful of broken caterans, irreclaimable thieves, who had been dissatisfied thitherto with their opportunity for plunder and little expected a check to their victorious rush upon London, stole away down Osmaston road in the dead of night and slipped across the Trent by Swarkestone bridge, before it was occupied by their advanced guard. At daybreak they began to raid the country. The inhabitants of King's Newton and Melbourne fled before them, taking them to be the forerunners of the prince's army. Plundering as they went, they did not halt until they came to Lockington, where they took undisputed possession of the hall. They passed the night there, and without troubling either cook or butler ate and drank at their ease.

In the morning, still confident, they went back in search of their laggard friends and found the bridge held by a party of well-armed Hanoverian volunteers. They skirted the river for several miles, but being very full it was nowhere fordable or swimmable. They came upon no other bridge—there was none nearer than Burton or Nottingham—and it would appear that in anticipation of the invasion all boats had been removed or hidden away. At Castle Donington they were confronted by a levy in mass of the inhabitants, armed with stick and stone, scythe, hedge-knife and bill, fowling-piece, blunderbuss and horse-pistol. They were forced to turn southwards; went as far as the wintry wilderness of Charnwood Forest, where they maintained themselves for a week or two by open pillage and petty larceny. When that country became too hot for them, they stole back across the Trent by night, perhaps over the bridge at Nottingham.

At Hucknall Torkard, eight miles north of that bridge, there is a respectable family claiming to be descended from a Scotch officer who had been left behind ill by the rebel army. Having been concealed and nursed back to health by some friendly stranger he remained, took a common English surname, married and begot English children. Would it be offensive to imagine that the Scotch officer was but one of our Highland marauders? And on that surmise could we build the half-probability that by some instinct they nosed their way to Thorneywood chase and lost themselves in Sherwood forest for a while? All however we know is that, travelling chiefly in the dark with no guidance but the stars, they contrived by a circuitous route and after many adventures, many narrow escapes, without loss of life, limb or liberty, to arrive at the wildest and most northerly part of Derbyshire.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### TALLY-HO !

WHEN night seemed deadeſt and Miſtreſs Ann was ſo nicely balanced between ſleep and wakefulneſs as to lack none of the diſcomforts of either ſtate, ſhe was ſtirred out of that chill back-aching conſcious unconſciousneſs by hearing Roland exclaim :

“They’ve mizzled !”

There was no ſound but of that ceafeleſs drip ; the fire had died out ; nothing could be ſeen but a narrow band of ſomething leſs than pure dark at the other end of the cave where the entrance was. It muſt have been that he felt the abſence of the caterans.

“Wake William up,” ſaid Miſtreſs Ann.

A moderate employment of voice and hand having failed, Roland at laſt roused him with his boot. He took the news very calmly, ſaying between two yawns :

“We can mak ſhift wi’out ’em.”

Roland went quietly forward. The cavern was unoccupied but by themſelves. He clambered to its mouth and looked forth. Day had not yet broken, but moon-light permeated the foggy air and was palely returned by the hoar-froſt that covered the ground. He crept out, then with William’s help got Miſtreſs Ann through into the open.

“Do you know the place ?” ſhe ſaid to her man.

“No, ma’am,” he answered, “and I dunna much care if I niver ſee’t again.”

It was a bank on the ſkirts of a little grassy knoll. But the front of the bank was ſhorn away ſo as to ſhow a thin ſeam of liſtſtone under the grass ; and below the ſtone, level with their feet, was an opening down into

the ground, say nine yards long and just wide enough to admit a man sidling through. It was like the grin, too narrow for the gape, of some fossil monster, and those jags of stone might pass for his few irregular tusks and teeth. One might have passed within a few yards of it and not noticed it. On their right hand close by was a little quarry carved into the knoll. Opposite the cave, rising above the moon-lighted mist, a mountainous ridge loomed large. They turned in the opposite direction, probably from a repulsion to that steep ascent, and without more delay moved quietly off. Immediately two or three Highlanders came up out of the quarry, and running after them round the knoll bade them stand in terms undistinguishable but in tones that were unmistakable. The rest of the band came up in a body, evidently ready to march and with their booty about them. One man had a couple of turkeys slung over a shoulder and a costly porcelain timepiece under the opposite arm; a second carried a miscellaneous bundle of clothing, others a sack of meal and a set of brass fire-irons, an inlaid cabinet together with a lady's riding-saddle, a pewter shaving-pot and a pair of silver candlesticks, a paltry framed print highly coloured and a gold-mounted jewel-casket containing I know not what valuables; while the rest had their plunder hidden in various pouches, baskets and sacks, and one had improvised a capacious hold-all by drawing together the waist-band of a woman's red flannel petticoat.

They evidently intended no further violence or restraint. Their voluble speeches were of course incomprehensible, but the fingers of their right hands plainly pointed the way their prisoners were to take. Doubtless they knowingly chose that direction for them, as being the one in which a traveller would be longest in coming to an inhabited place where a hue and cry might be raised. They themselves were on the right-about for that high ridge when William, his teeth all chattering, caught sight of the ruffian who wore with much satisfaction his own respectable wrap-rascal. That with cold

and hunger upset the balance of his temper. ordinarily cautious though obstinate. He strode up to the Highlandman, gripped him by the collar and cried :

"Gimme back my coat, thou lousy thief ! "

The man's dirk was out.

"Ah, do, thou bitch's son ! do if thou dare ! "

The next moment the weapon would have been in the provoker's body, had not the red-haired orator of the night before seized his comrade's wrist and at the same time thrust his stalwart body between him and the Englishman. He also said something sharp and short, which being accompanied by a glance towards the lady probably had reference to her presence. Anyhow the man with the dagger dropped his purpose of instant vengeance, but stood with a look of haughty wrath bent on William ; who seeing it threw off Roland's great-coat and exclaimed :

"Here's for oad England and the Derby hills that are so free ! Hell away thy bloody steel, thou murderous villyand, an' faight it out wi' me like a mon."

He chose his ground well, a level plot finely turfed and clear of the knobs of limestone which here and there cropped up through that inch-deep soil. There he planted himself firmly, his fists advanced in the proper boxing attitude, and said :

"Coom on ! 'Tis no sweating job stanning here nak'd. Art feared ? Thou'rt keen enoo to slice men up an' steal their coats, an' yit thou denies 'em Christian satisfaction."

The universal language of expression interpreted the words to the Gael. Darkly scowling he again raised his dagger. His comrades uttered a shout, apparently of remonstrance.

"Well, sooner nor hae no contentment at all I'll faight thee wi' one hond tied behind."

William put his left arm behind his back and offered his right to the battle. His opponent perfectly understood the taunt. He turned livid with fury, looked round on his fellows as though seeking counsel under circum-

stances so unusual, perceived the look of amused expectation on their countenances, cast his dirk away, uttered a Gaelic war-cry and sprang at his challenger's throat. William's fist met him on the mouth and laid him flat.

"First knock-down blow! First blood!" cried Roland. "And we shall win it!"

The Highlander rose none the worse except in appearance and again rushed in. William's fist landed on his nose, but less effective merely thrust him back. Again gathering himself together he sprang upon the slower Englishman like a live battering-ram, took him by surprise, butted him in the wind and bore him to the ground. The Gaels raised a congratulatory shout. William lay and gasped, but between the gasps said:

"I'm all reet, sir. I shall—tue the line—afore Broughton's hafe minute's up. I wish he'd putten a pound o' beef—into my belly—i'stead o' his fow yed."

The Highlandman, looking all the grimmer for his bloody nose, swelled his chest out, folded his arms over it and gazed down on his prostrate foe with an air of triumphant contempt. The mist had cleared somewhat and the moon showed its round pale face. If it occupied the west then that mountainous ridge stretched along the north. Its crest was now plainly to be seen, and lay on it like some huge sleeping beast of the lumbering lumpish sort, walrus or whale, couched on a dark cloud. In due time William was on his legs again, offering battle.

"Do stop fighting, William," said Mistress Ann.

"I conna, ma'am," answered he; "once a mon begins he mun keep on."

"I know where we are now. Yonder's Mam Tor."

"Dang Mam Tor, ma'am, by your lave. The mon afore me's enoo for one bellyful. I'll swaller Mam Tor when I've digested him."

The Highlander, challenged again, again leapt to the attack; William had to look to himself. He had had nothing to eat since yesternoon; and though the advantage was his in science, weight and coolness, the other man was far barder, suppler and nimbler. He made no

attempt to counter or parry, but knock-down blows had no more effect on him than just to knock him down. He rose immediately, and came on again as soon as he had risen. William began to lose breath and give ground, his adversary to press more persistently. At last he got close in and threw his sinewy arms tightly about William's body. There was a rough struggle for a minute or two, pully-haully; and the combatants' bodies swayed to and fro like trees in a hurricane. William's fists made their mark upon the Highlander's face; the Highlander's ever-tightening hug was gradually squeezing William's breath out of him. The freebooters urged their man on with eager ejaculations. The two English bystanders looked with equal interest, but Roland's well-meant encouragements were annulled by those loud opposing voices. In the end William's breath gave out and he was again thrown.

Nevertheless in good time he rose again and said to his mistress, who would have persuaded him that he had had punishment enough:

"Not a bit on't, ma'am. I shouldna mind it a brass farthing if the varmint didna stink so. It's nobbut that as floors me."

He still panted a little, his fists were swollen and bloody, his erstwhile florid cheeks pale. On the other hand one of the Highlandman's eyes was closed up and his mouth and nose were bleeding freely. Which was more to look at than in effect, for he came on again in rushes as vigorous and frequent as ever. William confined himself entirely to the defensive. There was a lightening of the sky in the east, there was a stirring of the wind from the north, there was a routing of the mist along the ground; day was at hand. Mam Tor's cloudy base now appeared as solid as its crest, and therefrom a lower ridge extended on either hand until it was lost in the gloom.

"This is the Buxton road," said Mistress Ann at a pause in the fight; "and that is the Winnats."

With her back to Mam Tor she pointed to a road close



by, and again to a craggy gap about a furlong off in the high ground beyond, apparently the mouth of a pass, to which the road ran and then seemed to plunge into the earth.

"I send 'em both," said William, "to t' same place as Mam Tor. Ma'am, it behooves me hae noat on my mind just now but how to best my mon."

As soon as he had spoken and she had dropped her pointing hand, they heard the faint up-wind blast of a horn, and immediately a horseman rode up on to the road through the gap, as it were out of the ground. He saw them, blew his horn again and galloped towards them. Behind him came up some half-dozen horsemen more and galloped after him. With the sound of their hoofs mixed the up-wind baying of hounds. The Highlanders drew together and seemed at first to be intending flight; but either encouraged by the fewness of the horsemen or deterred by the speed of their horses or reluctant to abandon their booty, they suddenly changed their minds, dropped the heavier part of their loads, drew their swords and swung their hide-bound targes to the front. The first horseman checked his steed out of striking distance and drew a pistol from his holster; a youngish man richly dressed in a long light-blue hunting-coat and mounted on a beautiful black Spanish jennet. A silver horn hung from his shoulder by a silken cord. The other riders had come up, handsomely dressed and well mounted gentlemen, of whom the most important-looking was an elderly person also wearing a light-blue coat, but the jennet he rode was white. By then a pack of hounds and their scarlet-coated attendants had come into sight up the same way, followed by a crowd of horsemen.

"Dunna stop uz, please your Grace," cried William. "'Tis a fair faight."

"Then," said the elderly gentleman, "confounded be his politics who interferes. Set to, and may the best man win."

Then raising his hat to the lady, "Your humble servant, madam," he said; and to the Highlanders, "Your servant, gentlemen."

The first-come cavalier returned his pistol to its holster. The caterans understanding there was to be provisional peace put their weapons up, but came as near as they might to his Grace and never relaxed the watchfulness of their eyes.

"A contest of manhood, gentlemen," said his Grace to his followers, who had begun to ride up. "Please to keep the ring."

They made a ring, gentlemen, the pick of the county and the pink of fashion, on steeds of light build and great activity, yeomen and farmers in homespun on animals nearer to the cart-horse, with a fringe of footmen and boys from the neighbouring villages. The huntsman and whippers-in stood behind shepherding their hounds. Most of the horsemen were armed, the gentlemen with pistols as well as swords, on account of the unsettled state of the district. Their leader dismounted and stood by Mistress Ann, saying:

"'Tis an unexpected pleasure, the meeting Mistress Ann Chance on Windy Knoll."

"I doubt not, my lord duke," said Mistress Ann, "'tis a pleasure as little desired as expected."

"Nobody shall say so, madam, in my hearing but your own licensed self. But in truth I take the freedom to own that I taste that same pleasure with a spicing of curiosity."

"There is a smack of that seasoning in my own less palatable dish. Indeed, your Grace, I know not what foot I am on here, whether of prisoner or spectator."

"You a prisoner, madam, and I stand by? Never."

"Then sure spectatorship is sometimes the most uncomfortable free thing in the world."

"It shall be our part, madam, to better its conditions."

Among the many gentlemen who saluted her the younger of the two cavaliers in blue was conspicuous.

"If there is any curiosity yet unawarded, madam," he said, "I humbly beg to put my claim in. I don't see your equipage anywhere."

"No, my Lord Hartington," she answered; "for 'tis not in sight."

"I would respectfully surmise that you have been deemed worthy to be promoted in this life to the angelic faculty of flight."

Mistress Ann laughed.

"No, my lord, my mode of progression is just as much angelic as my temper."

"Then, madam, I can have no doubt on't."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed a handsome youngster 'in cheerful green arrayed,' "is that you, Aunt Nan?"

"I am Aunt Nan," she answered, "if you are Nephew Frank."

"Father has been in a great taking about you, for your Tom came last night and told us you was lost in the fog. So him and me and all the men have been out—oh, half the night looking for you."

"'Twas kindly done of you."

"And now father has rid off to Asher to learn the truth on't. I should have gone too, but you see, I should only have been i' the gate; and missed the meet besides. Good Gad! Why, that's 'Bill Drew! Then there'll be a fight on't. Goo to wark, Bill, goo to wark!"

Not only the last speaker's but everybody's attention now left the banalities of courtesy to fix itself on the fight, which had begun anew. William was heartened up by the presence of so large a party of well-wishers to back him with their plaudits and encouragement; still he appeared to be more distressed than the Highlander and had again and again to give ground, until the red-coated huntsman piped forth in a high-pitched tenor:

"Thou wunna nivver finish it o' that back'ard how, Billy Drew. Goo forrards, mon, put all thy weight into't an' smack him i' t' chaps; hearty like, mon."

William went forwards, put all his considerable weight into it, unexpectedly met the Highlander when his spring was undeveloped, his equilibrium least stable, with a smashing blow full on the jaw and felled him. They had changed ground during the struggle, and the fallen man's head struck one of the many knobs of rock which

appeared through the turf. He lay stunned; most skulls would have been caved in by such a blow.

"Didna I tell thee?" piped the high-voiced huntsman triumphantly.

"Bravo!" said the duke. "You have fought like a true-bred Derbyshire man."

"Strong i' t' arm and thick i' t' yed," said Mistress Ann's nephew.

"Excuse the forward boy, your Grace," said Mistress Ann; "his Derbyshire yed is all he can boast on."

"The rest will come, madam," said his Grace. "I'll warrant him true Derbyshire breed." Then he turned again to Drew. "Whatever the stakes I treble them."

"Thank your Grace; we was faighting for my top-coat."

"You shall have mine then to keep you from a chill."

At the duke's bidding a groom unfastened the great-coat that was strapped to his saddle. "Put it on him."

It covered William from head to foot, a masterpiece of tailoring, gold-buttoned, silk-lined, sable-collared and cuffed. Before the month's end a young would-be buck who had just come into property down Crich way gave him ten acres of good grass for it and set him up as landowner.

"And here," said Lord Hartington, "are two guineas to line the pockets with."

"Thank you, your Grace; thank your lordship. But the wild petticoat-man ud a bet me if't hadna bin for that good hard bit of oad Derbyshire; he has a yed like a knog of oak. He mun hae hafe stakes ony road."

William stepped up to his antagonist, who without any fuss on his comrades' part had regained consciousness and was already sitting up and stripping himself of the coat, which he conceded that he had forfeited.

"Keep it, mon," said William; "thou'rt kindly welcome to't. I hae another for mysen, summat like a coat. And see! here's hafe stakes for thee." He put one of the guineas into the Highlander's palm. "Thou'st

addled it fair if ivver mon did. I wish we'd hafe a gallond o' good ale here, so's we could drink friends handsomely. Good-bye, Johnny; an' if e'er we meet again—which I conna say I'm very fierce for—we'll hae another touch. Shake honds, mon."

The Highlander, now stoutly on his feet, took the gifts and the hand with the same hearty good-will. His reply in words was abundant but in meaning only conjecturable. The sun had risen a glowing red ball over the Winnats. Mam Tor opposite seemed to have moved and come nearer. Lord Hartington approached the master of the hunt.

"What are your Grace's orders," asked he, "with regard to these men?"

His Grace turned to Mistress Ann.

"What is your account of them, madam?"

"They're Highlandmen doubtless," said she, "but I know little other harm by them."

His Grace laughed.

"Ah, we all know which side the ladies of the Chance family patch themselves."

"Nay, your Grace," said Frank Chance impetuously, "man and woman alike, we wear our likings on our faces."

His Grace laughed again, the easy man that he was.

"And on your tongues most of all, Master Frank."

He turned to the hunt. "But I fear, gentlemen, we shall be ill reported on if we let these men go without examination."

"We've letten 'em goo a'ready," said a blunt yeoman.

For during the colloquy the caterans, resuming their plunder, had been stealthily but quickly drawing aloof, and now they suddenly started off in open flight, heading straight for the steepest of Mam Tor, which was not more than a quarter of a mile off.

"After them, gentlemen all."

Immediately all the field was at the gallop, all the footmen at the run, all but the duke, the dismounted groom who held his own horse and his master's, and the hunts-

man and whippers-in attendant on the hounds. Soon these last heard a gun-shot, doubled by the echo. The leading horse ran staggeringly for another fifty yards, then fell with his rider.

"God bless us ! " exclaimed the huntsman. "His lardship's down ! "

"Haste, Castledine," said the duke. "Inquire how he does."

One of the whippers-in galloped off.

"His lardship's on's feet again, your Grace," piped the huntsman. "But poor Donna isna. Mr. Bagshawe has putten his lardship up on his own hoss. But they'll noan head 'em now, your Grace; they're hafe up Mam Tor a'ready. I nivver seed two-legged men run like 'em. Damn me if they wouldna gie Promise and Performance a good run; but 'twouldna do to put hounds in to varmin. That ud clane unlarn 'em all the dish-termination ivver they've larnt."

The duke turned again to Mistress Ann and said :

"I ask now, madam, what ought to have been my first word, I ask now with my humble apology, what may I have the honour of doing for you ? "

But before she had acknowledged the courtesy with more than a curtsy he missed Roland, who without a farewell, unless a farewell may be wrapped up in a thought, shown in a look, had stolen away in the direction opposed to that taken by the Highlanders, towards the rising ground above the Winnats.

"Where is that young gentleman with a white favour in his hat ? "

"He's yonner, your Grace," said his groom.

The duke had just let the Highlanders slip, and timid by reaction was afraid of a jealous government's animadversion.

"Go and fetch him back to me, you and Bramwell," he said.

Said Mistress Ann, "I give your Grace my assurance of his inoffensiveness. He was simply a fellow-captive with myself of those savages."

## FORTUNA CHANCE

"Accepting your assurance, madam, I doubt not he has no need to shrink from giving an account of himself. After him, you two, quickly, and bid him return with you."

"Your Grace," said Mistress Ann, "I pinned that favour in his hat myself as a protection against the Highlanders. He is the son of a gentleman of your own politics and religion."

"Then I must give myself the opportunity to beg his pardon for a momentary suspicion."

Probably the duke already had misgivings concerning his lenity to the Highlanders, but it would have been too late for him to give other orders in Roland's favour had he been so disposed. The groom had mounted after handing the duke's jennet to William Drew, the other whipper-in had beaten bitch Merry and dog Supple from under his horse's feet, and both were already out of call. Roland as soon as he saw that pursuit was intended set off at full speed, but he had gone hardly a furlong before he was fain to double to his left in order to avoid being run down. That brought him to the edge of the Winnats, the defile through which the road wound, and being desperate and young he made no more ado but dashed straight down the breakneck incline, a grassy slide let into a limestone precipice some two hundred feet high. The horsemen reined in at the top.

"Stop, thou fool, stop!" bawled the groom.

"And save thy neck dacently for t' hangman," shouted the whipper-in.

But Roland was in no condition to listen to advice however persuasive. He lost his footing immediately, the best thing that could happen to him. Thrown on his back he slid down at a fearful speed, feet first fortunately. He expected nothing better than an instant death. His back was on fire. But half-way down, just when he was beginning to swing round to head-first, his course was somewhat checked. The slope took a gentler and yet gentler pitch, was covered with a thicker herbage. Now sliding, now rolling, he descended at an ever

slackening velocity until he dropped into a deep trench and was stopped, safe but sorely bruised and his back half flayed. He lay still.

Said the whipper-in to the groom, "A brucken neck on his shou'ders, Bob, isna worth a wh-ole un on mine. To say noat o' t' hoss's, which is worth more nor ayther."

"To his Grace?"

"Him I were meaning."

They rode back to the mouth of the pass. The pain kept Roland alive to his danger. He descended stiffly to the road and limped away down-hill. In the defile there was an upward current of air by which the variable mist was blown along in rags, and the attack of day was still kept off by its rock barriers. Soon he heard behind him the clatter of horses' hoofs rapidly approaching. He drew aside, and keeping close to the left-hand cliff hurried on as fast as he could hobble, looking desperately for a way of escape, if only a hole in which to enniche himself. Suddenly the clatter of the hoofs ceased, and there was the sound of men's voices in loud colloquy. Probably his pursuers had stopped at the place of his descent and were looking for the corpse.

"I tell thee," said one, whom Roland laid to be the groom, "he's stuck fast hafe-way down t' cliff."

"An' I tell thee," said the other, "as thou'lt blether next of a mon sticking fast hafe-way down Hathersage steeple."

"There's ne'er a crumb on him at bottom."

"He wasna meant to die so, nor yit to be drowned."

The horses were again in motion but less hurriedly, as though their riders were searching as they went.

"There's some hidy-holes in t' rock somewheer hereabouts," said the groom. "Thinkst he'd creep into one on 'em?"

"Go look!" answered the whipper-in contemptuously; "he's a furriner, he knows noat o' t' country; he'll foller his nose; if he's up to follering oat."

At that very moment Roland, who at forty yards'



distance was a shadow among shadows, a shred of mist among other shreds, saw a narrow opening, a mere nick in the face of the rock. He bowed his head and slipped in; it was the entrance to a dark little cave. The horsemen rode by. He sank to the slimy ground exhausted. For a while he knew nothing but pain, was in a despoiled sort of consciousness even of that, being unable to fix how he came by it or in what part he suffered it. It was indeed a painful numbness to pain rather than the true feeling of it.

## CHAPTER XXV

### HOPE AND THE RIVER

HE was roused by the return of the horses and of the men's voices. Painfully he rose and straightened himself up until when two feet short of his height his head touched the roof. The horsemen approached through the mist like night phantoms gradually assuming day and substance. They seemed to be for going by when one of them, the groom conjecturably, stopped and said :

"I belave that's one o' them little hidy-holes I meant. Ho'd my hoss; I hae a feeling like as he were theer. Anyhow I'll goo an' mope for him from one end on't to tother."

Roland stooped more and moved up the dark cavern hands first, feeling his way by the dripping walls, and the sound of his footsteps was covered by the groom's noisy dismounting and approach. Still as he went the cave became lower and narrower. He had to come to a stop before he was jammed in. He felt like a rat in a trap, caught. But his imminent peril gave his faculties the spur. At that last step he struck one of his feet against a loose stone. With a desperate intention he stooped and raised it; it was about as big as a man's head. He met the groom, who was blundering up the cave head foremost, stooping more than need was, and using the stone as a battering-ram he smote him on the crown. The groom staggered back to the mouth of the cave half-stunned.

"Drawed a damned blank," he said.

"To'd thee so," answered the whipper-in.

"Not that nayther awtogether, for I got to t' end on't sooner nor I tho't an' joled my yed again t' floor."

"Again t' roof, thou manes."

"Both, mon; my feet again t' roof an' my yed again t' floor. It mun be as hard as a Hathersage mill-stun not to a cauvéd in."

As the groom mounted again the whipper-in whistled and said, "The duke'll mak a fine to-do I doubt."

"Yo mun find him a fox, or that failin' a hare."

They rode away, the groom rubbing his sore head, the whipper-in humming the refrain of a popular song, "And was not, was not that a pity?" As soon as he dared Roland came forth from his cramped position, and hastened downhill at something as near a run as he could manage. As he rapidly descended the mist thickened. A pallid light went about in it but with the furtiveness of a stray; it made the mist itself visible and little else. On either side rose the cliffs, unsubstantial, apparent only for a portion of their height, like the beginnings of a threat. When he came where the

nucleus of a denser fog, which approaching him took gradually a less exaggerated size, a more definite form, as the umbra, then the substance and hardly that of a man; a gaunt fleshless stooping figure, clad in leather from brimless hat to much-worn shoes. He carried a basket of mining tools at his back; his hair and beard were long and wild and black, but perhaps the mist gave some of that deathly ghastliness to the leaden hue of his skin. Roland was for passing by, but the newcomer stood in his way. He spoke, and his speech was as strange and uncouth as his appearance.

"Hast seed oat," he said, "o' t' chap as killed hissel deäð a-tumblin' from top to bottom o' t' Winnats? Dost hear? Spake or else let a be."

Roland stood dumbfounded.

"Aw reet. Let a be then. But mebbe thou'rt him thysel. Thou'rt noan deäð, and yet thou doesna look

quite wick.<sup>1</sup> I reckon thou'st bin so nee death 'at thou'st seed his fow<sup>2</sup> face and art frettened o't. Well, deäð or wick, lad, dunna goo down into Castleton. Iv thou does wi' that face they'll nab thee, sure as sure, for a deäð mon out a-walkin'."

"Which way must I take?" said Roland at last.

"I've a feelin' for thee, lad. I'm welly nee death mysel, an' I goo about sayin' 'Which way mun I tak?' But I hanna gotten no kindly answer from nayther parson nor clerk nor nubbudy. An' I sit awwhoam<sup>3</sup> an' think it ower wi' mich labber, but my tho'ts gie me no kindly answer. 'T'oad trodden way, thou fool,' say they aw. But it looks awful lonely to be sich a common way. Well, well, what mun be mun be. I can show thee a road 'at wunna do for me. Look up, mon; foller me. For thee, noan for me."

The miner led him by a foot-path across a level meadow thick with fog, white with frost. After a while the ground began to rise and he saw before him dimly, first a smoking furnace, then heaps of mineral rubbish encumbering the hillside, a rude hovel or two, and appearances of men and women apparently busy thereabouts.

"But I munna let t' folk see thee," his guide muttered. "Mebbe they'd ax more questions nor thou'st answers for i' thy poke."

He led him aside up the hill, which increased rapidly in steepness. Soon the fog was so thin before them that the dividing line of hill and sky appeared above. It was indeed the same ridge as Roland had seen from Windy Knoll, and that was Mam Tor itself looming large on their left hand. From far away down the valley came the sound of a horn. The guide stopped and said:

"Dost want to get to Hope?"

Roland caught at the well-omened name.

"Ay, to Hope if I may. But where is Hope?"

"We conna see't for t' mist: but hark to me. Thou

<sup>1</sup> Quick, alive.

<sup>2</sup> Foul, ugly.

<sup>3</sup> At home

mun goo up to yonner rigg, and thou mun kape along it while thou cooms to Back Tor. Thou'll meet nub-budy; Jack Shepherd'll be gone after t' hounds."

"How shall I know Back Tor?" asked Roland.

"By t' name. 'Twill rare up its back afore thee like a great awful cat; high up afore thee, like things thou sees i' thy sleep. Then if thou'rt boun' for Hope, thou mun lave follerin' t' rigg an' draw a little to t' reet an' pass unner Lose Hill; that'll bring thee straight to Hope. Lose Hill's o' one side Hope an' Win Hill o' tother. Down Lose Hill, that mun be; up Win Hill, that may be. But atween Hope an' Win Hill there's a river."

"What river?" asked Roland.

"Some ud say t' river Jordan; I say t' river Noe."

"No?"

"Ay, or Noe river; accordin' as thou taks it."

With such enigmatical words he turned his back on Roland's thanks and slunk downhill again into the fog. Roland strode uphill. The rise was abrupt; he was soon out of the fog and out of breath. He rested a little while and then clambered higher. He saw gorse in bloom; like a friendly face it put heart into him and before long he gained the ridge. On either side he saw a valley fog-possessed, beyond which hills stood dimly forth like darksome cliffs repelling a white sea. Especially on the left one huge formless thing towered up, a flat-topped lump of a mountain, and occupied all that front, seeming only the more sullenly grey for the sunlight that played upon its frown. To his unaccustomed eyes it looked like a monstrous deformity in stone; he was glad to turn away to the task before him.

He followed the ridge and after about half a mile came to Back Tor; he did not mistake it, he knew it by its name. For the ridge which had hitherto been fairly even suddenly leapt up before him; and the hillside on his left hand was shorn clean away leaving a sheer precipice. He avoided it on the right, still heading in nearly the same direction. After Back Tor the ridge rose yet higher, then rapidly falling disappeared in the

fog. Would that be Lose Hill? Yonder in front of him beyond the waste of fog stood forth a sun-lit eminence crowned by a peak, which sat on it like a dwarf's cap on a gigantic head. Was that Win Hill? And was Hope anywhere between the two? Anyhow he declined the rise offered him close at hand, and descending into the valley made straight for the sunny hill beyond.

The fog was somewhat less dense than before, but soon he lost sight of both hills and everything but the ground he trod on, no wide circle. He reached the level ground at the bottom, and almost walked into a little knot of men a-foot armed with bill-hooks, sickles and stakes. One of them saw him and raised a shout; but before they had made their dash for him he had run by. Before he had run many yards he found the ground before him traversed by a swift stream, jumped in up to his middle and waded across. Was that the river Noe? It certainly was not no river. His pursuers shouting to one another contradictory recommendations ran some up and some down in search of a better crossing-place, lost sight of him and did not trouble him again. Still he ran on across a narrow meadow, until the upward tilt and the roughness of the ground brought him to a more moderate pace. Presently the ascent was so steep that he was constrained to bear a little to the right in order to ease it. Where was Hope? Had he gone by and lost it, or was it still attainably before him?

He heard the thud of horses' hoofs on the hillside, stopped and crouched among the heather. Two horse-men appeared out of the fog about a furlong off; so much clearer was the air. He lay still while they rode by into the fog again; then he rose and pushed on more hurriedly, always lessening the gradient by taking it aslant. He reached a height at which there was a strong breeze, icy-cold to his sweaty brow, and the air was clear; which was not at first apparent to him, so dim were his eyes in that turmoil of his blood. He stood panting,

doubled up, only long enough to half-regain his breath and eyesight, then mechanically resumed his course, but without aim, his strength almost spent, his spirits lapsed. Weary of climbing he turned and moved on almost at a level, having the rising steep on his left hand and the descending on his right. He felt that he had somehow missed Hope, felt beset on every side by armed horsemen and footmen. The ground became yet rougher, often boggy or crossed by watercourses, and the steeps upon his left and right were yet steeper. After a while the sun, which had been troubling his eyes, shone upon his back, a sensible relief. Still he stumbled on, not looking so far forward as to his next step, ever thinking that his then step would be his last. Unawares he must have begun to descend, for he was again involved in mist, unless that dimness was caused by a clouding of his vision. But he also heard, which must have been outward; heard the faint clatter from below of horses' hoofs as on a hard road.

Suddenly his going tended abruptly downwards; some dozen short staggering steps. Then as it seemed by the greater effort asked of him the succeeding step, the thirteenth or so, was planted on ground as abruptly mounting. His hinder foot refused the effort; he stood panting with a hand on each knee. Without any sound of approach a man stood before him. His heart gave a leap, his feet were fastened to the ground; he thought he was taken. Next moment he perceived the Highland dress; he was a second or two longer in seeing that the outstretched hand held not a weapon but a flask glittering with silver. One hand released a knee, accepted the flask and put it to his mouth. He drank of the brandy in it and straightened his back. His clearer sight recognized the Highlanders' forespeaker. He had descended into a tiny clough, a mere furrow, running straight down the hillside. It had a dribble of water at the bottom and a scattering all along of young oak and beech.

The Highlander turned away downhill beckoning him

to follow; which he did limping. Soon they came where the fog was somewhat denser and a thicker growth of beech saplings, which still kept much of their foliage, afforded considerable cover. There more Highlanders were gathered, the bulk of them it seemed, seated against trees or lying along the bank. These hardly lifted an eye on the new-comer, but the orator gave him a hunch of bread from his pouch. It would seem that even during the hazards of flight they had ventured on a little thievery.

A breeze was springing up and the fog was fast disappearing. On the other side of the valley, about a mile away, a jagged cliff dimly appeared. Sunshine crowned the beech under which Roland sat and ate, and it turned the dull russet leaves to the colour of flame. From the topmost bough a robin began to sing. When it had sung it fluttered down to the branch just over Roland's head, twittered there a little, alighted on the ground at his feet, looked him boldly in the face, came within arm's length and pecked up the crumbs he dropped. Then again it flew to its singing place and renewed its song. The Highlanders, who had seemed so sullenly indifferent to Roland's presence, had every man turned and looked and listened with an absorbed interest while the little bird piped and hopped. As soon as it flew away, as though that had been the signal, the whole party rose and stole in silence down the clough, which deepened somewhat as it descended. It descended so quickly that in a few minutes they had overtaken the receding mist. Then they came upon one of their fellows. He put up his hand; they stopped at once and crouched where they stood, so as to make the most of the shelter afforded by the trees and the ground. Roland did as they did. Not only could he hear from below the rush of a turbulent river but also men's voices.

Now only in the trough of the valley had the fog any body. The outlaws looking to their every step went down a little further, almost to the mouth of the clough. The river into which it drained itself was so near that



they could see its furtive gleam. Standing and listening they could hear the voices of Englishmen stationed close at hand, the stamping of their horses, the jingling of their accoutrements. Apparently these were keeping careless watch, for loud speech and laughter passed from one to another. Presently there was a double thump upon the ground above, such as a jack-hare would make with his strong hind-legs. Immediately each Highlander adjusted his booty, then with his right hand quietly unsheathed sword, with his left clutched dirk and assumed shield or made ready his claymore with both. The orator put a naked dagger into Roland's hand.

Again they stood and waited, silent, motionless; until there was again that double thump. Then they all together sprang out of hiding and with a loud barbaric shout, the very scream of war, dashed down to the river; also to a bridge and a party of horsemen on and by it, a dozen or more, of whom some were mounted, some dismounted, all unprepared. Their horses took fright at the outcry and the clash of arms. The foremost reared and threw his rider, half of them bolted in a body; of the rest two were hocked, one pistolled, and their riders fell with them. Only one Englishman fired a shot, only one drew sword, and they were among those who had dismounted. He who fired fired into the air, his pistol being knocked up by a Highland targe, whose spike forthwith did rough dentistry upon his teeth. He who drew did but just let blood in a cateran's arm and was felled by the stock of the cateran's pistol. The bridge was carried at one rush. Roland was the last to clear it. A farmer whose horse had been disabled hooked him round the throat with his whip, and said:

"Who's to pee for poor oad Ball?" Roland threatened him with the dirk. "A carving-knife? Thankee kindly; 'tisna our dinner-time yit."

With that he let Roland pass. Two teeth knocked out, three horses disabled was the sum of the bloodshed. It was evidently no desire of the crafty freebooters to rouse the country against them by unnecessary violence.

By then the gentleman who had been thrown at the first end of the bridge had risen to his feet, confounded as much by the present quiet as by that furious onset and his fall.

"Where's Barker? Where's Wright?" he said to a comrade who had kept his seat, and scarcely that.

"Oh, they have matched their horses one against tother and are now engaged *equis virisque* in settling the wager."

"And what have you been doing?"

"Practising the noble art of equitation."

"Then I may say that I have been practising the noble art of disequitation?"

"The noblest art of all, witness the performances of the noble Carteret, the noble Pulteney, the noble Walpole and the equally noble etceteras."

The unhorsed gentleman was now horsed again, and the two ~~le~~ off apace with such few others as had kept their ground and saved their horses, leaving the gentleman who had been stunned to condole with the gentleman who was spitting out his teeth. In a quarter of a mile the road divided right and left, up and down the valley. The stampede of the horses had been stayed and they were returning to the pursuit. Moreover the alarm had spread as if on wings and other horsemen were riding up post-haste on either hand. But the Highlandmen, taking the shortest road to safety, had turned neither to right nor left but had run straight up what fronted them. Neither its steepness nor roughness affected their speed one whit, but to Roland, out of condition and mauled as he was, it seemed to frown down like a very hill of difficulty. He fell behind, and would soon have been overtaken had not the orator stepped back to him and taken him under the arm. At a word from him another stalwart mountaineer did the like on the other side. Thus the two upheld his failing strength as with mainstays and hurried, almost dragged him along at a pace that was marvellous under the circumstances. As for Roland he worked his legs without

## FORTUNA CHANCE

volition; being subjected to the will of the men who ran on either side of him.

The ground before them became yet steeper, more thickly beset with boulders and other impediments; they were approaching the cliff that capped its brow. Then there was the report of a gun. The cateran with the fowling-piece had shot down the horse of the foremost rider. Next moment Roland's supporters dropped him behind a great lump of rock and sped on without apparent break; but instead of attempting immediately to scale the cliff they wheeled to the right and ran under it for some distance, with the effect, perhaps the intention of bending the line of pursuit from pointing towards Roland. Their comrades had all taken or now took the same direction. Those of the hunters who put a restraining value on their horses or their necks turned back, others whose horses were not too blown still pursued eagerly, the rest straggled after as they might. But these were under the disadvantage that whereas the caterans could choose a place and scramble over the edge, the best of light horses used to that country would have to go round.

Roland was left alone. He could see nothing but the cloudless sky and the crinkled stems, dark foliage and withered bloom of the heather in which he lay; heard nothing but the continual rustle of the breeze there-through and the occasional cry of a grouse, that barking laugh ending in a grunting chuckle. Lassitude had seized him. He lay with no thought of rising, and let the action of his arrest pass and repass through his brain with such variations as his errant imagination invented, a moving picture in which his part was wholly passive.

He lay thus for quite an hour; then he heard footsteps. He believed that the time was come for the realization of his visionary dread. He waited, lying, with little more emotion than he had lain and imagined. It seemed long, yet was but a few seconds before the footsteps ceased, a man stood over him. He had to open his eyes and take him in; until then he did not

know that his eyes were shut. It was the red-haired orator. The difference between that and his expectation was so great that he had to shut his eyes again to stay the whirling of his brain. When again he opened them the orator beckoned to him to rise. Still he lay until the orator took him by the hand and helped him up, then with repeated gestures invited him to follow, admonished him to hasten. Follow he did, but at first slowly, stiffly. He was led straight to the cliff, up whose face he had a zigzag ascent pointed out to him, quite practicable with a little rough clambering and here and there the help of the Highlander's strong right hand. He had never flushed with an angrier shame than when he conceded that such help was necessary to him. Being fairly over the top he stopped to recover breath.

He thought he had never beheld so dreary a scene as that which lay before him; a desolate wilderness of moor and morass first dipping down, then swelling up towards a long grey cliff. He looked questioningly at his guide as much as to say, "Does our path lie that way?" It is not strange that he failed to take in the fine contrast between that sullen-visaged down-slope of dusky ling rarely broken by patches of bleached grass and the varied colouring of the up-slope on which the sun shone. Over there the masses of heather were of a dark purple-brown, the withered herbage was of a lightsome yellow-brown, streaked with living emerald along the water-courses, and flecked here and there with the gleam of a withren birch stem; but all these were surrounded, overgrown, dominated by the superabundant rich red-brown of the bracken and crowned by the grey extension of that cliff.

The orator answered Roland's questioning look by turning and leading the way, not across the moor but skirting it, keeping far enough from the edge of the cliff they had just climbed to be hidden from the valley. On their left hand was Win Hill with its conical peak and higher up the valley a lesser height, whose summit glowed red in the sun against the dull green of its base.

Beyond that extended a lofty moor; towards which the orator pointed, making Roland understand by signs that their steps were tending thitherward. After a mile and a half of rough walking they went down into a deep gorge, tributary to the river valley, by way of a steep clough. They crossed the brook and the road that ran through the gorge, and immediately entered a rift in its opposite side. Up this they clambered, and came out on the skirts of the elevated moor whose sky-line had been so conspicuous before them. Here the orator let Roland lie awhile and recover breath and strength. The man-forsaken aspect of their surroundings gave a sense of security.

After a short rest again they went on, generally uphill at first but at no difficult gradient. They seemed to be out of the world, encompassed on every hand by huge hills destitute of grace of form, unless austerity be a grace, the austerity of secular hermits of desolation. Lumps of cloud moreover, white and grey, had begun to get about, not close-packed but enough to discourage the day's wintry cheerfulness and lower the earth's colouring to a general sombreness. But Roland had no eyes for scenery, good or bad. It took his every endeavour to keep up with the orator; breathing hard at the ascents, stumbling at the descents, falling heels-up on a sheet of ice, he often dropped behind but always made it up before it seemed to be noticed by his leader, who with claymore at back and bundle of thievery on shoulder strode along at one swift pace, untirable. Whatever the temperature might be in the valley the wind at that height was piercingly cold; the ground was frozen hard and there was many a drift of snow, remains of that heavy fall which had been forgotten for almost a month in the lowlands.

Twice as they approached a cluster of huge detached stones Roland mistook them—perhaps his eyes were dim—for a gathering of humble cottages. Soon after this happened the second time they traversed the hill-crest, which for a long while had risen slightly above

them on their left. A valley opened out before them, a down-sweep of moorland picked by a ravine and half walled in amphitheatre-like by the ridge on which they stood; but its lower depths were hidden by a final abrupt descent. As abruptly rose its farther barrier, backed and topped by a multiplicity of huge hills which were obscured by the very light they were seen by. The orator had stopped, apparently to consider his course, but his gaze was drawn, perhaps unwittingly, from the straightforward north to the west. As for Roland as soon as his leader stood he sat. lay down.

The sun being near his setting had burst through the clouds which had chilled his fervour, and was retorting it upon them by transforming their colourless tissues into robes of state about him as ample as the horizon, of every imperial tint, such blendings of azure, gold and flame as to name them man has only the tongueless speech of wonder. The impressionable air was filled with a fiery palpitation; the darkening earth flushed, though it was too late o' day to glow. But the valley below was in the shade, and the heights behind which the light-giver was sinking remained dusky, featureless, unimpressed, untouched. Their reserve however only emphasized the red warmth of the general response.

The orator gazed on. Maybe in thought he stood on the long mountain watching the sun set behind Scour Ouran, or from the stormy coast beheld far Morven frown under a transitory splendour. Maybe recollection of a hovel beside some wild shore, in some savage glen, by some solitary tarn or on some barren mountain-side raised yearnings for a rude mate and naked children which overpowered for the moment all other thoughts. Roland was so glad to lie that he had no room for any other emotion. But the sun went down, gradually the fire became smoke, a gorgeous smoke it is true, suffused with purples, shot through with flames, but every moment turning to the spectator more and more of the dark side of a night cloud. Then the middle heaven received half of the splendour that the west had lost;

on its wide bosom the pageant had ample room, and proceeded from cloud to cloud with the stealth of a blush, the tidal sweep of a sea incarnadine, until it bathed the earth on either side and gave it for a fugitive minute a tincture of cloud-colouring.

It was enough. The orator turned his face northward and again strode along, keeping near the line of that high ridge. As the glory faded from the zenith it reappeared, though much diminished, in the east, where the sky and the interference of yon lofty edges seemed to be surprised by the promise of another dawn. But the orator did not look that way; he stepped on like one who had to make the most of the remaining daylight, and as for Roland, following stiffly, his soul for the time being was as earthward as his boots. At the most he knew on which side they were of the highest ground by a difference in the force of the blast upon his right cheek.

From time to time as they made their toilsome way through that wilderness the orator whistled loud, but it was long before he got the response that he listened for. The earth slipped off her day-trappings to the last rag and prepared with due solemnity for night. There was hardly more than light enough to mark the separation between earth and sky, when at last a faint answering whistle was heard, and immediately a man's form erected itself on the skyline in front where it lumped itself up into a hill. They went straight for the whistler. It was a little wiry man, the most ponderously punctilious of the caterans. The two fellow-countrymen held a short consultation, during which Roland stood and felt at once the disability of the deaf and the inferiority of a hanger-on. At the end of it they with him again addressed themselves to their way, but so that he felt the direct attack of the bitter wind which had been sidelong. It stung him into some consciousness of their surroundings. They seemed to be on a plateau which lay pretty level before them, but here and there swelled up humpily on either side. He

looked back once; there was still discernible in the heavens the wan trail of the day. He looked up more than once; perhaps a star peeped between the shifting clouds. But on earth save for the occasional glimmer of snow or ice there was no variation in the general duskiness.

The last trace of day disappeared; snow and ice were almost as black under his feet as the heather. The earth seemed to exhale darkness. Far as eye could reach, east, west, north, south, there was an awful oneness of unrelieved gloom, which his imagination extended on and on before his weary feet, an *ad infinitum* of dreariness and horror. Again and again the Highlandmen whistled, but their whistling was blown back unanswered into their mouths. Still they struggled on, with perhaps the push of the wind to keep them steady to their direction, the coy peeping of those single stars was too uncertain. They got entangled in a difficult tract of deep peaty slime cut by frequent watercourses and obstructed by half-frozen sloughs. Weary and bemired to the middle they gave up the attempt, and lay down in the driest lair they could select without much trouble. Roland could not ask and did not vex himself with surmise or forecast; he lay down like the others with no shelter from the wind but a somewhat puny growth of heather and bilberry.



## CHAPTER XXVI

HA NEIL SASSENACH

WHEN the Highlanders woke Roland it was the lighter for the uprising of the moon. Otherwise he would not have believed that he had done more than lie down and rise again. The moon, though little past the full, was low in the heavens and often clouded over; still by its glinting light the mountaineers managed to find a water-parting where there was a somewhat more stable footing. Facing the wind again they strode on with a springy action which may have been mere walking, but Roland could not keep up with it without some covert trotting. Indeed the orator went like a machine of iron, and his comrade though small was as tough and supple as a heather twig. After a while a piercing whistle from due north turned them in that direction; and soon they met the whistler, William Drew's antagonist, walking towards them beside a ravine of inscrutable depth whence came the sound of flowing water. He led them along gently descending ground perhaps a mile further, to where they found the rest of their company couched on the lee side of a low ridge. The route these had taken will never be known, but some slight indications would rather point to a wide circuit by Bradfield. If it were so, their reunion so exactly made on that remote hill-side must be esteemed a masterpiece of bog-trotting. But they were twelve hungry men with nothing to eat. They all moved together down the moor.

After a mile of quick walking they came upon a one-storied cottage, set just where the ground began to decline most rapidly into a valley. They could see the opposite ascent rising darkly towards the moon and at its

foot a glimmer of lights, an uncertain one or two. But that little cottage was all alone on the moor. Together they went to the door; one of them opened it, four pushed in. There was but one man within sitting by a dead fire; such light as there was came through the half-open door of an inner room. The man looked up with no inquiry either on his tongue or in his eyes; but as soon as he saw the nature of the intrusion he sprang up, immediately wroth.

"Get your gate!" he cried hoarsely. "Yo're noan wanted here to-neet!" He seized the poker which lay across the hearth. "Or it'll be the war<sup>1</sup> for ye."

But before he could use his weapon he was gripped by the two nearest of the caterans, and in spite of a furious resistance was speedily overpowered by the four. Others entered and rummaged the house for food or booty. It was no long search. On a little deal table there were set a loaf of bread and a lump of cheese on trenchers; also a leathern jug full of ale with two horn mugs and a beechen bowl beside it. In the corner cupboard there was a little ark or chest; but before the finder could lift the lid there came a pitiful cry from the first man to enter the inner room.

The snatchers of the loaf, the cheese and the ale put them back; the finder of the ark did not meddle with it. They and all the others except the prisoner's custodians crowded into the inner room. By a guttering rushlight set on a chair they saw a bed and upon it a rudely made coffin not yet closed up. Some hardly entered, some stayed by the door, others went near enough to see that the coffin held the corpses of a young woman and a newborn babe. Each as he saw uttered an exclamation which in its weird brevity had all the substance of a wail. Their countenances expressed abhorrence of the desecration they had committed. The man of the house felt the constraint upon him relaxed, he suddenly tore himself loose and rushed forth unpursued. Of the Highlanders in the inner room those who had bonnets doffed them; then all

<sup>1</sup> Worse.

knelt where they had stood, signed themselves with the cross on forehead and breast, and muttered what seemed to be a short prayer. As they were quietly withdrawing the orator took a guinea from his sporran and laid it on the coffin lid. Those who saw it murmured approval; each of them took a like coin and laid it beside the orator's. Those who had gone out returned and did the same; until there were eleven guineas in a row. Then they left the house quietly, reverently. Roland had stayed outside in ignorance.

As soon as the last man had closed the door they heard footsteps hastily approaching. They did not stay to count how many; they were in no mood for further violence. With bare-footed stealth they quickly dispersed into the night. The orator alone remained by Roland, who ran straight forward with simple speed. They were but well astart when there was the report of a fire-arm behind them. The Highlander gave a low breath-catching grunt unnoticed by Roland and dropped his bundle, but still he ran. After time enough for reloading they heard another gun-shot at a longer range; then apparently pursuit ceased. Still they two ran perhaps for a furlong; then the orator stopped, pointed across the dark moor and with his hands as it were wafted Roland away.

"Shall not you come too?" said Roland.

They were incomprehensible alien words but again the eloquent peremptory hands sufficed.

"Why do you stay?" said Roland.

For answer the Highlander lay down on the ground, deliberately, without any show of weariness. His face was pale, but that is the common effect of moonlight.

"Is anything the matter?" said Roland.

Again the hands gesticulated but less vigorously.

"I will not go without you," said Roland in tones unmistakable, and himself sat down.

The hands ceased to appeal.

"Can I do anything for you?" said Roland. "Are you hurt?"

"Anneal sassenah," said the Highlander; that or something like that.

He lay still awhile with the moon-haunted clouds above him and beneath the black earth. Then Roland said:

"Why don't you rise and follow the others?"

"Anneal sassenah," answered the orator with little or no failure of voice.

He lay still. The wind was keen; he did not make the most of his plaid, at which he had before shown himself so skilful. Roland tried to draw it about him, but the Highlander seemed to resent the touch of his hands and pushed them from him.

Something like an hour later Roland heard away to leeward a faint shrill whistle.

"Isn't that your friends signalling?" he said.

"Neal sassenah," answered the other, but with a hoarse faintness as though he were sinking to sleep.

Roland felt a growing fear of the inertness that had fallen upon his protector. When the whistle was repeated from about the same distance, he whistled back down the wind as close an imitation as he could. Probably however those distant signallers perceived a difference, for their signalling was not renewed. Still the orator neither spoke nor moved. Again Roland sat down, lay back and submitted to be cold and ill at ease. In that position he beheld nothing but the flocking clouds, night-birds, swans some of them, some ravens, some white with the wings of a martin or winged and bellied like a magpie. But whatever they were it was nothing fixed, for they were ever changing place and aspect, crowding, thinning, parting, now moonlit, now moon-left or again moon-riven, when the planet appeared for a little while deep within a cavern of snow and amber. Of the night they made as restless and fickle a thing as anything that belongs to day. The wind swept over him without let or hindrance. In the half-quiet between its blasts he heard the babbling, bubbling, gurgling and gushing of water with a persistent stealthy trickle as undersong. When it blew again, less boisterously

at first, a bunch of dry rushes near his ears chirruped like so many chickens. When he raised himself on his elbow he could see nothing of the Highlander but the grey glimmer of his face among the dark heather. At last the moon swam quite free of the clouds; then, seeing more clearly, he was the more afraid of those shut eyes, that drawn mouth.

"Are you awake?" he said.

The closed eyelids opened and closed again; the mouth made the movements, hardly the sound of "Neal sassenah." He stood up and looked about him. The moon was high in the sky; he judged that it was about midnight. He saw a flickering light in the direction of the solitary cottage. In spite of the possible danger he was attracted by it, not as a more than doubtful offer of help but as company, as mere light; though but a speck it was so much more warmly coloured than the wide diffusions of the spectral moon. He began to draw the Highlander's huge claymore, but as soon as it rattled in the scabbard its owner was roused, opened his eyes, muttered an exclamation, even lifted his head; but quickly dropped it again, closed his eyes and let the weapon be unsheathed without another word or sign. Roland stuck it in the frozen ground upright and put his hat on it, so that he might have a mark for his return. He drew off his great-coat and gently dropped it over the Highlander's body, then stole towards the light. He neither resolved nor not resolved to seek assistance.

When he was near enough to distinguish the dim outline of the cottage from the bank of black moor behind it he heard the repeated tap of a hammer, not loud but very distinct, like a blow given to the silence. The light was beside the cottage, fronting its door, but he was within twenty yards of it before he saw that it came from a horn lantern hung at the tail of a cart. He could then also perceive that one of the rooms, the inner one whose casement looked away from him up the moor westward, was lighted up. He stole to the nearest corner of the cottage, stood in its shadow and listened. The taps had ceased;

but there was a rumble of men's voices, of which one and another speech came distinctly to him.

"T' ale's out."

"Art ready, Job, mon?"

"Coom, thou mun dree<sup>1</sup> what thou canna mend."

"Shape yoursels and put honds to't. Now, all together, mates."

There was the shuffle of heavy boots, as of men blundering under a somewhat unmanageable burden; there was what seemed a knocking against a wall, a grazing against a door-post, with one directing voice:

"Higher 'er yed, Dick. Not so woodenly, mon; there's a barn in't. That'll do. Steady, chaps! Le' me an' Job backen a bit. Now forrards!"

Roland's heart came into his mouth. Next moment a coffin was borne out by four men and placed in the cart. Two went back, fetched torches out of the house and lighted them at the lantern. Then they all moved off. One man trudged at the horse's head with the lantern in his hand, one bore a torch on each side of the cart; the fourth walked by himself behind, chief mourner, a torch in one hand and a bough of box in the other. About his stumpy figure hung a crumpled black cloak, so much too long for him that he had ado to keep it off the ground. Labouring men in ragged smocks, an equipage fresh from a miry job of field carting, a plain deal box, the stench of two-pennorth of pitch, and as requiem or chant funereal the squeak of unoiled wheels; that was all the pomp of the ceremonial. Nevertheless the only spectator suffered an overwhelming awe.

He stood looking after it as long as he could see the torches' smoky flames or hear the wheels grate, then he instructed his feet to return. But what he had just seen encouraged his fears. He did not know what change might not have happened in his absence. Thus he walked between two terrors, as if he were going towards that which he was going from. Death was a repulsive, an uncouth and above all a strange terror to him. To the

<sup>1</sup> Endure.

elderly it has become a familiar fear, will at last take its proper aspect of the final friend, the close grip they had on life having gradually without essential change been transformed into a hand-in-hand with dissolution.

His preoccupation helped the night, and in spite of the moon he missed his aim at the upright claymore. For an hour or two he searched that wilderness, all of one self hue and surface, until from very weariness he longed for the sight of what before had been his dread. At last by good luck he found himself again by the cottage. Thence he made a fresh start, set his direction as well as he could by the moon, and going with more heed arrived in a few minutes exactly at the Highlander's lair. He saw that the Highlander had one white hand uncovered, which gave him at least the satisfaction of living company. But with his bodily exhaustion his imagination also was worn out. For the time being he apprehended no more than he saw, a man lying with his eyes shut on the heather. He put the hand back under cover, lay down close by, so that his great-coat might serve as coverlet to both of them, folded his arms tight over his chest, drew up his legs and in spite of the cold soon fell asleep.

When he awoke night was blankly abiding the pale attack of day, which apparently was a piece of that strategy called a feint. He was so stiff that he could not rise. Throughout his whole body there seemed to be one disabling pain, all but in his feet which were cold past pain. Nevertheless he forced himself to turn on his other side towards his companion, who appeared to be still sleeping. He was struck by the ghastly whiteness of his face; but tried to persuade himself that it was due to that wan light. But as the light increased, painting a few loitering clouds with hues not their own and little by little giving the earth back its proper colouring, the Highlander's face became not less ghastly but more. In the same degree his fear became more afraid and his persuasion less persuaded, until at length the sun flashed the signal of life over the skyline of the moors

and death became the sum of his thoughts. Conquering his body he rose to his numb feet, which could not feel the ground they stood on. With difficulty he stooped and with a cold hand touched the icy cold hand that lay upon the orator's breast. The Highlander opened his eyes. Their glittering stare took nothing from the ghastliness of his cheeks and lips.

"What is the matter with you?" said Roland.

"Anneal sassenah," the Highlander seemed to answer faintly.

He lifted a finger and beckoned Roland to kneel by him. With a gasp between each motion he took out the contents of his sporran and put them into the young man's hand, some half-dozen pewter spoons, a bunch of seals, some pieces of money, gold and silver, a few copper tokens and a baby's coral. With much pain he took his dirk from his right side and a metal-handled pistol from his left and handed them to him. Then, having his face to the sun, he pointed accurately northwards with his left hand over his right shoulder.

"What do you mean?" said Roland faltering. "What ails you?"

He lifted the great-coat and surveyed him from head to foot; there was no sign of any injury or aught amiss but that general deathliness. He took him by the hand and signified his wish to help him rise; but the Highlander shook his head and pointed earthwards, skywards. Roland would fain have misunderstood, but he was compelled to understand, for at the same moment he saw a tinge of red, not much but enough, on the heather which was his comrade's couch.

"You were shot by yonder man!" he cried.

"Neal sassenah," whispered the Highlander, again feebly setting a white finger towards the north.

Roland drew the coat over him again and without more delay ran, but quite away from that finger-point, ran as fast as his stiff limbs and frost-bound feet would carry him straight to the cottage on the edge of the moor.



Nobody answered his knock. He did not repeat it; the door had sounded so hollow under his knuckles, too suggestive of that tapping in the night. He lifted the latch and peeped diffidently in. The room was empty alike of the living and the dead. He entered, and with much repugnance made search for anything that might be of comfort to his wounded comrade, instinctively avoiding the inner room. He found nothing eatable but the crust of a meslin loaf, half wheat, half rye, and the rind of a piece of cheese that were left on the table. He took them and an old coat that hung on the wall, and having put a few of the Highlander's silver coins down in payment ran back with them.

The Highlander lifted his white eyelids at his approach. Roland knelt beside him and wrapped his feet in the coat, then as the best that he could do offered him a piece of the bread, feeling the while how like it was to a mockery. The wounded man turned his eyes from it in abhorrence. He lay and breathed in pants while Roland looked down on him, smitten with shame at his own helplessness. Presently he put a bloodless finger to bloodless lips; and on a repetition of the gesture Roland guessed after a little pondering that it was a sign of thirst. He ran again to the cottage, took the wooden bowl that was on the table, returned with it on limbs suppled by the exercise, and having washed out the taint of ale filled it at a brooklet that flowed within a few yards of their lair. The Highlander drained it greedily, every drop. Roland offered, with a certain terror too, to turn him over on his side, so that he might ascertain the extent of his injury and if possible apply some unskilful bandaging; but the orator resisted resolutely, even angrily, not only with his dead weight but with more force than he had seemed master of. Again he beckoned, pointed over his right shoulder, wafted Roland away, uttering words vehement but Gaelic, extenuated whispers as to sound. That was his last effort; his hand dropped, his white eyelids closed. Roland stood beside him; he could not take his eyes off him.

The next token of life the Highlander gave was a repetition of that sign of thirst, finger upon lip. Roland ran again to the brook. The sight of it suggested that he too was thirsty and he drank deeply of the clear water, though its coldness made him gasp. After the Highlander had drunk again, he again tried to persuade him to eat, but not succeeding did himself eat up those remnants of bread and cheese. Feeling the better for it, he set about exploring the neighbourhood. He ascended the nearest knoll and gazed about him, the air being somewhat thick though the sky was clear. Turned westwards he could see nothing but the wide upward swell of the moor on which he stood. North and eastwards it was separated from other lofty moors by a little hurrying river, which ran deep down round the foot of the hill he stood upon, and flowed away towards the sun through a widening valley. Beyond the cottage, about a mile and a half way on the other side of the river, he could see the few, dim roofs of a hamlet. All the rest seemed given up to grouse, woodcock and peewit.

Having regard to his own and the Highlander's common danger he durst not appeal to a collection of houses, but he spent as long a time as he might leave the wounded man alone in searching for a solitary dwelling, from which he could venture to beg assistance. He had given up what seemed a vain search and had returned within a quarter of a mile of the cottage, when between it and the river he came upon a little hidden-away keeper's cabin, lodged in a small pit-like hollow of that falling ground. It was a pure chance, for the chimney gave forth no perceptible smoke, and its humble moss-grown roof was hardly to be distinguished from the surrounding bank. Even then he was not much forwarder, for the man and dog were out ratting at a distance, the woman had gone to the other side of the river on a day-long gossiping expedition—the funeral at her only neighbour's would have been matter enough without the Highlanders' raid—and as a precaution against arson and breakage she had taken all the children

with her. She had locked the door too, which she would never have done but for the last night's scare. There seemed to be nothing then for Roland but to await the cottager's return and what dubious advantage that might offer. The rest of the day he spent in the waiting, with nothing to vary it but two or three fruitless returns to the cabin and frequent visits to the brook, for the wounded man's thirst never left him.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### BISHOPED PORRIDGE

THE sun set, and he began to fear that he might be left for another night helplessly alone with a dying man, perhaps a dead one. Indeed there was not enough light to assure him when he looked, and he looked often, that the Highlander's pallor was not already that of death. But at last he heard a sound coming from beyond the cottage, a sound dimly distinguishable on close listening as of singing, a faint dirge-like chant. His skin a-prick, he went forward, as if to meet such a funeral pageant as he had witnessed the night before. All the way his eyes made him out of nothing a ghost-like semblance of it, a procession of moving unsubstantialities. But presently his ears told him that the voice was one, a man's, hoarse, heavy, lugubrious. Then with much relief, some surprise and disgust, he recognized the words of the song as a familiar anti-Jacobite refrain :

"Twang 'em, we'll bang 'em,  
And hang 'em up all."

Such the words again and again repeated, and the tune was a maudlin monotonous suitable to them.

Before he reached the cottage the singer passed in and immediately the song ceased. He went up to the door, which had been left open; but the interior was dark, he could see nothing. Only he could hear a man sobbing, the unrestrained sobbing of drunkenness, and between the sobs such ejaculations as these :

"Mary, my feer! <sup>1</sup> An' t' little un! It'll be co'd for all on's. Why werta in sich a hurry? Twenty's

<sup>1</sup> Mate, wife.

no age for to dee; no age at all. Thou wert well-nee moidered<sup>1</sup> wi' me, I know, but if thou'd telled me, Mary, I mun do better or else we mun goo our sere-ways,<sup>2</sup> belike I should a done better. I'm nobbut a mon, Mary, a lundy day-tale mon.<sup>3</sup> Thou might a gien me that much warning, An' t' little un! T' bonny little barn! Our awn little barn! Our little coddie<sup>4</sup> lamb! I know, I know. Heaven's our whooam. Thou said so. Sure an' sartain hope o' th' insurrection to—summat. I know that too, t' parson said so; but it doesn't keep me warm. An' who'll durse<sup>5</sup> t'ouse for me now?"

But Roland had already withdrawn quietly out of hearing, ashamed at having mischanced to be eaves-dropper to so private an utterance, disturbed too by so unrestrained an exhibition of grief. Soon the cottager again broke out into his chant, lugubriously warlike, of "Twang 'em and bang 'em." When Roland again drew near he was in the act of striking a flint. Though operating with a tipsy clumsiness he managed, as Roland stood outside, by turns to kindle tinder, sulphur-tipped match and rushlight, still singing or rather howling:

"Twang 'em, we'll bang 'em,  
And hang 'em up all;  
Twang 'em, we'll bang 'em,  
And ——"

At that moment he caught sight of Roland, who stood in the outer darkness below the step, so that his stature was robbed of a foot and his clothes were indistinguishable. Only such faint candle-light fell on his face as half revealed its almost girlish oval, set about with an abundance of brown hair. The cottager sprang up crying in a tone of awe:

"Is't thee, Mary?"

Roland could not answer; his voice seemed frozen up. "Isn't it thee, Mary? Then why doesn't thee coom

<sup>1</sup> Distracted.      <sup>2</sup> Different ways.      <sup>3</sup> Clumsy day-labourer.

<sup>4</sup> Pet.

<sup>5</sup> Dress, do up.

in? Wheer's t' little barn? And why dosta wear black? 'Tis sich a griesly<sup>1</sup> colour! Speak, woman! Say as I may coom to thee, if thou moan't coom to me. I've bin—thou knowst wheer; but faith an' trawth I'm awful sober now. 'Tis nobbut thy silence; it maks me a wee bit mazy."

The man's hope was as terrible as his terror. Roland made a great effort and spoke, with a fear-riven voice.

"'Tis not—'tis only a fellow-man."

"Only a mon! 'Tis a mon's voice anyhow. What's this damned leet done to thy face then? Answer, mon. Nay, words be damned. Coom in, mon; gie's thy hond an' let's feel thee how th' art made."

Roland entered though sorely tried and put out his hand, which the other gripped convulsively.

"Ay, 'tis a mon, sure-lye."

He let Roland's hand drop, and his own.

"I tho' "—his sobs began again by littles—"an' I were reet glad—an' flaughtered<sup>2</sup> an' all—I tho't 'twere—but—• Alas 'at ever!"

His sobs got the upper hand and dispossessed his words. Roland looked on not knowing what to do or say, forgetful of his errand. Suddenly the sobs ceased, the man drew his hand across his tear-drenched face, looked up and said quite soberly:

"What didsta coom here for, lad?"

Roland sprang back into recollection.

"I want help. There has a man been shot. Come with me. I have been too long away."

"What mon?"

"One of the Highlanders. Come quick."

"One o' them wild men? Then I shot him; wi' Sam Swinscoe's gun."

The man's excitement, alike the alcoholic and the emotional, had been laid or been overlaid by his natural phlegm. He rose without hurry, lit the rushlight in a battered horn lantern and with that in his hand followed Roland out and across the moor. When they

<sup>1</sup> Ugly.

<sup>2</sup> Frightened.

had gone about half the distance he cried "Stop!" to Roland, who was always ahead of him.

"What is it?" said Roland, stopping but only half turning to him.

"Is he hurt bad?"

"I fear so. But make haste! 'Tis time I was back."

"Fust let's unnerstand wersens. Arta one on 'em?"

"Yes—no."

"Arta Hob i' th' Hurst?"<sup>1</sup>

"What's that?"

"He's a yes-and-no sort o' person."

"I'm an Englishman. I have only been with him——" It seemed impossible that he had only been in the Highlander's company those two days. "But make haste, prithee. By this time he may be—wanting drink."

"Lemme say my say; then thou mayst hang me if thou wilt. My name's Job Owlett. I shot 'im. I didna like nother your looks nor your havers.<sup>2</sup> I weened yo'd com for to rob an' reive. But yo touched noat an' left me 'leven gold guineas on"—the man's stolidity was again broken momentarily—"yo know wheer."

"I don't know; I stayed outside. Come along!"

Job Owlett's heels seemed lightened by the confession. They sped together over the moor and quickly reached the wounded man, who it seemed to Roland had not stirred a finger. The Yorkshireman surveyed him by the light of the lantern, then said:

"He's a tidy weight, but howsumever we mun carry him to t'ouse. Tak thou him by t' legs."

But as soon as the cottager, who was short but of right sturdy build, began not at all roughly to pass his hands under the Highlander's arm-pits, he felt a cold hand feebly resisting, heard strange words faintly uttered but in the tone of a fierce forbidding.

"Let a-be, Johnny," said the cottager; "it sounds uncouth. I shot thee an' it behooves me to do t' best I

<sup>1</sup> A kind of elf.

<sup>2</sup> Behaviour, manners.

can for thee. Thou shalt not lig here i' t' co'd all neet, if I burst mysel for't. Up wee'm, laid, handily!"

As with a mighty effort on the part of Job, who bore the chief weight, they lifted the orator, the agony forced from him a groan.

"Whisht, Johnny mon, dunnot do that," said the Yorkshireman; "it taks our wee bit o' strength."

The protest was unnecessary; the Highlander made no further concession to pain, though he must have suffered much during the transport. His bearers dared not lay him down to take breath, and their foreheads were raining sweat long before they had him in and laid him on the bed and were free to hold their sides and pant.

"Why, th' art nobbut a yoongster, but th' art a lad o' wax," said Job. "Thou's done varry well. How dosta feel now, Johnny?" The sufferer's mouth went but witho' audible sound. "What does he say?"

"Near sassenah, I believe," answered Roland at a guess.

"What does 't mane?"

"I wish I knew, if 'twould do him any good."

"He's a sort o' deaf an' dumb madlin<sup>1</sup> belike? Nother spakes nor unnerstans plain English?"

"Not a word," said Roland; "he's a foreigner."

"Poor cratur! Afore he wants for happins he shall hae my coat. I' faith we might ha done better to lay him on t' floor; he's on a misfort'nate bed."

They chafed his icy feet.

"We must have a doctor to him," said Roland.

"There bain't noan nearer nor Barnsley, ten mile an' a wee bit, an' he wouldna coom for t' likes o' me or him this time o' neet. Besides he's wunnerful strong for t' law an' again poachers an' all misdoers. He'd fust cure t' poor chap—one o' King Defender's men, bain't 'e?—an' then get him hanged. Happens we shall both hang together. Howsumever at t' fust skreik o' day I'll gang for him. How his een glores at me!

<sup>1</sup> Idiot.



Damn all them far-off shootin' things, says I. If 'e'd bin at arm's length I couldna a fun it i' my heart to do't, but all I seed wor t' neet an' a runnin' shadder."

While they talked the wounded man lay and but just lived, drawing a scanty breath, apparently neither hearing nor seeing. But Roland went and fetched the coat and the lantern which had been left on the moor, and Job lighted a peat fire in the outer room, the house-place. That done the host bade Roland cut what he would from a loaf of rye bread which he had brought with him. He himself lay down by the hearth on the bare earthen floor and slept with his right arm for a pillow. Roland had no easier couch, except that he had Job's old coat rolled up under his head. Many times he rose in the night to give the Highlander what relief he could from a pipkin of water, and the slumber of exhaustion into which he recurred was crossed by his waking fears, by Job's continuous snoring and occasional snorting, by the pain of his half-flayed back, by the discomforts of cold feet and an uneasy position, by the flicker of the swaling rushlight, by the silence and extended immobility of that figure on the bed. When he woke up finally after his longest spell of sleep, stiff, chill and ill-rested, the rushlight had guttered itself out and its dying stench filled the room. His host was already up and had renewed the fire. On his face the red excitement of over-night had given place to the grey despair of morn. His bloodshot eyes hardly glanced towards his guest, his drooping head barely gave him the nod of greeting, his tongue was dry of a word. He listlessly filled a saucepan with water, dropped into it two handfuls of oatmeal from the ark in the cupboard, added a pinch of salt and a sliced onion and then set it on the fire.

Roland opened the door; it was impossible to guess at the hour by that cloudy sky. The spiritless day seemed to have made a truce instead of a fight of it with the sullen night. He shut the door and went into the chamber. Its window was curtained over with a piece

of sheeting, in honour probably of its last occupant. Like waiting attendants the shadows were gathered round the bed, which the wounded man already occupied with the rigidity of a corpse. When spoken to he made no response but the momentary lifting of his leaden eyelids. Roland returned to the house-place. Job stood over the fire stirring the simmering water-gruel with a wooden spoon. As soon as it boiled he poured it into two wooden porringers which stood on the table, set wooden spoons by them, a wooden salt bowl and the rye loaf; wherefrom he cut a slice an inch thick and divided it into two. Then he invited his guest to the table, saying:

"Sit thee down, lad. It's bishoped, I doubt; but thou 'rt hungry happens."

"I wonder if he could sup a little of this," said Roland.

"Nav, I 'k after thysel an' I'll tend on him."

Job took the other porringer and went into the chamber. Roland was glad enough to sit by the smoky hearth and make sippets of his bread in the hot thin liquid. He heard from the other room words of rough Yorkshire invitation and encouragement, unanswered by anything audible. Presently the Yorkshireman returned and put his untasted basin of gruel on the table.

"Thou'd better sup it all up, if thou can'st; he winna touch it, an' he's reet. Atin's dreigh<sup>1</sup> wark."

"You han't eaten yourself," said Roland.

"I've etten my bellyful. Here's t' bread, an' theer's t' knife; help thysel. Don't lave no manners-bit."

Job sat heavily down by the ashy hearth opposite to his guest, and seemed to be watching the sulky smoke miss the chimney and perversely stray into the room. Roland's appetite suddenly failed, the remainder of the food disgusted him. If "bishoped" meant burnt, the gruel certainly was that; but he wondered how he could have eaten anything in such an atmosphere of death and despair. He rose and went in to the orator; but immed-

<sup>1</sup> Dreary.

ately came back and said with white face and faltering tongue:

"He's gone."

"Not yit," said Job; "not yit. I've killed him; I shall know when he's deä. I shall feel 't about my awn throttle."

The dying man's lack of the common ministrations on the dying ranked higher with Roland just then than his own mortal danger.

"Tell me where, and I'll fetch the doctor."

"I'll goo mysel. I shot him, an' I'll pay t' damage. Besides he wouldna coom for a furriner belike; he's a hodd chap, is t' doctor, an' noat to lippen<sup>1</sup> to. If thou'st had ony truck with them wild men, thou'd better keep out o' t' road when he cooms; he's a fur'ous King Jarge's mon, is t' doctor. I weetna for why, unless mebbe for becos his awn name's Jarge."

"I never saw them until the night before last."

"That's all reet, if t' doctor thinks so. Now I'll gang. There's more meal i' t' ark, I belave, an' there's a great lunshin o' bread i' t' buffet. If thou'rt i' lack of oat else an' can find it i' t' 'ouse, tak it an' welcome. Dunnot let chimley reek; just keep up a lilli-low.<sup>2</sup> Sam's Prudence, the dawdy, lives not a quarter of a mile off, an' she has een like a hawk's and a newsy tongue. Now I'll goo my ways. Slot the door after me."

"Don't be long gone."

"No fear o' that; dunnot glawm,<sup>3</sup> lad. I'll call at t' ale-us at Langsett an' borry t' landlord's tit. I'll tell t' doctor I'm com for to pay him for~~y~~ for what he didn't do."

His face, which had somewhat cleared during this conversation, clouded again, as if the substance of a pall had come between him and daylight; such daylight as there was. He went out and walked downhill with a lumbering stride, which took him along faster than the appearance was.

About an hour later Roland heard horses coming up-

<sup>1</sup> Trust.

<sup>2</sup> Flickering flame.

<sup>3</sup> Look gloomy.

hill, a number of them, towards the house. He leapt to the door to make sure that it was bolted, then cowered in the corner least in view from the window. They trotted up to the cottage and stopped. Breathless he heard voices in colloquy.

"Is this the dwelling of the man who was attacked and plundered by the rebels?"

"Ay, sir."

"See if he's within."

Roland heard somebody dismount and lift the latch.

"It's locked, sir, and t' mon's out. I canna see noat in at winders, it's that dark. Shall I bash t' door in?"

"Nay, we've no quarrel with it; and since the man's not in we've naught to do with his chairs and tables. On, men, quick, for Holmfirth!"

Evidently the caterans were being actively pursued. But no more can be said for certain about them than that they were not overtaken at Holmfirth or elsewhere. Rumour during the next two or three days gave report of them, a thin uncertain sound, in divers widely separated places. Either they must have divided their numbers or skipped to and fro with an almost preternatural agility, or else folk's fear-gadded imaginations broke the traces and ran quite free of the lumbering old chariot of truth. Anyhow after that nothing more, so far as I know, is ascertainable of them. They simply disappear, fade away like one of their own mountain mists.

Still the day dragged dully on, neither brightening nor glooming more, and gave no hint how the clock went. Still Job delayed his return. It was supposable that he had not succeeded in borrowing the Langsett landlord's tit. The wounded man on the bed seemed to be fully occupied in the feeble irregular alternations of breathing. If there were anything doing within by his thinking part, there was no sign of it on his grey impassive face. Roland's occupation seemed to be well-nigh all thinking. The little else he had to do, to keep the fire in, to wait on the dying man's unquenchable thirst, to watch cautiously from the window for the

loiterer's return, made little break in its sombre sequences. Lacking skill to do anything with the oatmeal he dined off the remains of the bread. At last day sulked out and left the night, which had seemed to be with it all the time. It was of no avail then to watch by the window. He durst not light a candle for fear of Sam's Prudence's curiosity; the only light in the place was a tiny glow on the shadowy hearth, like the sinister red peep out of the dark of an eye, swinishly small, bodiless. And with the dark came the irresolvable doubt whether what he was waiting on was a man or the slough of one. For the Highlander had not spoken since noon; he made no reply to Roland's tremulous questions; the mute signalling of eye or lip was no longer decipherable; his faint breathing, if still he breathed, was no longer perceptible.

Roland had never had but one hideous glimpse of death's face, he had never looked on it deliberately; his imagination was peopled with the fears and superstitions of his times. Every little sound, the stealthy settling of the slow embers on the hearth, the creak of a joist, the rattle of a casement, the soaming of the wind in the chimney or its larger yet more subdued voice on the wide moor, had a ghostly meaning for him. When he could no longer endure being in the same house with his dread he went out. But the night was so dark that he seemed to have carried the limitations of the house and its terrors with him. Yet being without he shrank from going in again.

While he stood waiting, with all his senses concentrated on that of hearing, another sound was added to the sounds of the night; far-off at first, an unplaced murmur, but gradually rising in audibility as a human voice, the voice of singing, Job's, to the tune of the same empty doggerel about "Twang 'em and bang 'em," as the night before. Roland went back in. Soon the singer came up dolefully bawling, but just on the other side of the threshold paused in his song and his going, as though a thought had struck him. Then from the dark interior he heard the stern question :

"Where's the doctor?"

"T' doctor? Who arta?"

"You know who I am."

"I dunnot. But thou may be the dule for oat I care."

"'Twang 'em, we'll bang

An' hang 'em" —

But what didsta say about t' doctor? What's t' good o' him? *Now?* Arta noan lakin'?<sup>1</sup> Is 't ony good, dosta think? Why doesn't tha answer? Dunnot I spake plain?"

He strode with a heavy haste over the threshold, as though his beery brain was goaded by a sudden impossible hope.

"Wheer's t' candle? Quick! Lemme see for mysel!"

Groping hurriedly he found the candle-box, but before he had succeeded in kindling a rush-light at the gleed his flimsy hope fell in ruins.

"Nay, nay! I knowed 'twere no good; she's yonner."

Doubtless he went back as if bodily to the little village on that bleak north-eastern slope, to the tiny church and its rood of burial ground; went and came again.

"Ay, ay, I know. In sure an' sartain midhope o' t' insurrection to—— Nay, it canna be that. Of coorse we allus bury at Midhope, it's t' parish we belang, but it's a poor little place; there's noat sure an' sartain about it but pain an' poverty—an' t' churchyard yate."<sup>2</sup> At last the candle gave forth its dim light. "Dang it all, is 't thou, lad? I ha forgot summat. What hae I forgot?"

"You went to fetch a doctor. And the man's in sore need of one; unless——"

"I knowed ower well it couldna be for her. An' yit it might a bin. Ay, now I unbethink me. I went for to borrrer Maister Nix's tit, an' my throat was all dry an' hask from t' lips down'ards, an' that fust can—hisn's no taplash,<sup>3</sup> it's gar-em-ken-us ale—seemed to call for

<sup>1</sup> Larking, playing.

<sup>2</sup> Gate.

<sup>3</sup> Swipes.

another and another; an' I knowed the mon ud dee whether or no—'tis a deen' time—an' it didn't seem o' that much account—noat seems o' much account now—an' so—I meant to keep touch, but I've made a swine o' mysel; again. Dosta think she seed me?"

Without waiting for the reluctant answer he put his hand into his pocket and brought out a handful of money, gold, silver and copper, mixed with various tattered bank-notes, some of as low a value as sixpence.

"Who does these belang?" he said.

"How should I know? Where did you get them from?"

"He left 'em, him an' tother wild men, on—t' lid."

Roland took one of the gold coins and looked at it, a new guinea impressed with the older head of Georgius Secundus.

"Then I believe they're mine. But if you would keep them you're heartily welcome to them."

"Keep 'em, lad? Keep the dule?<sup>1</sup> They're dules i' my pocket, big an' little, an' they say all the time, 'Drink, Job Owlett, bezzle, swill us down, wear<sup>2</sup> us on thy guts; there's noat better for thee now. She winna know; or winna care.' Nay, nay, tak 'em all back; happen she does know."

He thrust the money into Roland's hands and immediately seemed to feel relief, which manifested itself in a burst of tears. When that had passed he took the rushlight and went into the inner room, followed by Roland. Job spoke in a loud voice as if to hearten himself:

"Well, brother, how arta to-neet?"

As if roused out of sleep the Highlander opened his eyes, uttered a faint but audible "Ha neil Sassenach."

"He says 'kneel,' whatsomever else he says, and kneel we mun," quoth Job.

They both knelt. What passed through their minds who shall record? It was the orator's last effort; when they rose again the jaw had dropped; the eyes were fixed.

<sup>1</sup> Devil.

<sup>2</sup> Spend.

Roland had never felt so far from the support and comfort of a friend.

"Coom back into t' 'ouse," whispered Job. "We'll lave him t' candle on t' chair; we mun do wi' what h't o' leet cooms thorough t' door-stead."

At the door he stopped and turned, put his hand on the jamb to steady himself, said in a hoarse and broken voice:

"In sure an' sartain hope, brother, o' t' insurrection to summat."

Roland bowed and crossed himself, and murmured a "Requiescat in pace."

So they went forth.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

R. I. P.

IN the morning after a breakfast of water-gruel, during which nothing was said but the few words of course, Job Owlett put on his hat, and with a gruff "I'm a-goo'in'" over his left shoulder lifted the latch.

"Where are you going?" asked Roland.

"To gie mysel up to t' constable."

"What for?"

"For——"

His thumb, jerked over his shoulder towards the door of the inner room, filled his sentence up.

"They may hang you."

"They han t' reet on't."

"You must be mad."

"'Tis varry like."

"They came to rob you. I'm exceeding sorry you shot him instead of another, but I think you was justified in shooting."

"Ay? An' wouldsta tell 'em so if they nabbed me for't?"

"Nay, I must be moving off; I have stayed here too long already."

"Thou'rt noan a-goo'in' to lave me alone wi' him i' t' 'ouse? I couldna dree<sup>1</sup> it. Justifeed or unjustifeed I did it, an' I durstna stop alone wee'm. Thou mun stay an' help me bury 'im."

Reluctant to consent, unable to refuse, Roland did not know what to say, but his host seemed to feel relief at having emmeshed another life in the hazards of his own.

"Any'ow," he said, "I'll finish my breakfast."

<sup>1</sup> Endure.

He did so, and to his former indifferent meal added a second hearty one. At the end of which he said :

"Thou seemst a honest dacent-like English lad. How didsta coom to tak up wi' sich a party o' wasters?"

"I mayn't tell you."

"Wheer dosta coom from?"

"It matters not."

"What's thy name?"

"I can't say."

Job Owlett looked at him with a certain dull admiration.

"Thou'rt oad for sich a yoongster; thou'st a wunnerful gift o' not sayin'. By my saul, I wish I could larn it on thee. Thou thinks there's no call for me to goo an' split on mysel?"

"None whatever."

"Then I winna. That's a beginnin'. To-day shall be a hall'da<sup>1</sup> for me. I'm nobbut a day-tale mon wi' Maister Bazeley o'er-anent Penistone, an' that's four mile off."

"'Tis a long way to lie from your work."

"'Tis a lang way; 'tis a lang lang way if thou'st a wife nigh her time, a lone woman, wi' nobody to send for t' midwife when she's taen wi' her pains. That's how 'tis Mary's out i' t' co'd and I'm here. If they'd nobbut a letten us hae that little house at Penistone, we should be both by t' same fireside, us an' a pratty little barn."

"Why couldn't you live at Penistone?"

"For becos we belang Midhope parish reetfully, an' t' overseer at Penistone was afeared on's gettin' a settlement theer. They're varry careful folk hereabouts; so careful it's hard wark for a poor mon to live. But now I mun flit, with license or without. I hae a nont an' nuncle at Wakefield, I'll goo to them. But fust I'll see t' poor mon buried i' t' churchyard side by side wi' her."

"There'd be questions asked which you'd find it hard to answer."

"Nay, that's ne'er bin a hardship wi' me; but I some-

times ha' questions axed 'at I find it mighty hard not to answer."

"That's worse still."

"I want Mary here to tell me what to do. I shall miss her. My God! I shall miss her sore afore I ha' done."

Roland hastened to give a turn to his thoughts.

"We must dig a grave ourselves and bury him on the moor."

"Dosta think he'd rest out o' t' blessed ground? It's an awful thing when a deäd mon can nother be quiet hissel nor let other folk be quiet."

"Maybe he'd rest better there; I think 'twould be liker his own savage country."

"Ah? I reckon them wild men han different natures to ourn. But we'll humour t' poor chap; he shall hae his awn way; then happens he'll forgie me that little hole i' t' small on's back. But thou mun be chief mourner. I ha' bin chief mourner once a'ready this week, an' that once is enoo."

Now San's Prudence, who lived in the little cabin near by in the hollow, was a slow-motioned draggle-tail with noticing eyes set in a sallow and otherwise inexpressive face, and she had much questioning with herself that morning why Job did not return to his work at Penistone. Three days off for the funeral and its preparations and two more given to beer and sorrow seemed to her exact calculations enough. And now though she or one of the children was always out on the watch, yet another morning had dawned and he had not been seen to cross the river by the stepping-stones and traverse the narrow valley towards Langsett. The routine of the tiny house was nothing to a woman of her mental activity; the brown-ware mug that Martha, the young besom, had broken overnight had been fully treated from every point of view but Martha's. As the circumjacent air is sucked into the jaws of a vacuum, so her thoughts were irresistibly drawn by the attraction of her ignorance. Three or four inches of snow had fallen during the night, but that did not daunt her. She left a flasketful of

half-washed clothes for Phœbe to finish off as best she could, bade Alice see to it that the kettle of broth did not boil over, set Martha to keep Mary and John from the fire, gave Billy a parting smack by way of arrearage for the past, satisfaction for the present and promise for the future, then took her way to Job's cottage with an indirectness in strange contrast with the straightforwardness of her intellectual method. The bit of knitting she had in her hands had been her excuse all winter for not minding her own business. The snow was not deep enough to cover the heather except at the drifts, which lined and dappled and flecked the general greyishness with pure white. The waft of the sullen air was from the north. The lowering clouds that covered the sky had a sulky withholding look, though now and then they dropped a flake or two of snow.

Her not aimless wanderings brought her at last to a shallow drift of the ground in a line with the cottage, where she could squat unseen among the heather and keep a close watch upon Job's house-door. There was no reason why she should not have gone straight to the door, lifted the sneck and looked in. That in the end the coldness of her feet would make it her only course was present to her all along, with the probability that she would only see himself drunk along the floor and the leathern jug empty on the table. Meanwhile she preferred to dally, to twitch her shawl, to knit a stitch or two of her stocking and to enjoy the multiform pleasure of surmise; although her utmost imagination was that he had gone for a soldier in General Wade's army. She had crouched thus maybe for half an hour when Job came out quite sober, with a spade and pickaxe over his shoulder. He looked about him on every hand and then went up the moor. As soon as he had gone far enough to be hidden by the swell and fall of the ground, she rose and dawdled after him. Her fancy was as active as her body was indolent, and the spade had set it running upon hidden treasure. It was certain that since his wife's death Job had changed a guinea at the

Langsett alehouse, and had made a display of unusual wealth both in treating and self-indulgence. Slowly as she went she came upon him sooner than she expected, just beyond the first ridge. He was bent over his spade. Her quick instinct was to draw back, but as her body was sluggishly obeying it he looked up and saw her. She sauntered down the slope, trailing her shawl, her eyes apparently more occupied with her knitting-needles than him. Job threw his spade down by his pickaxe and advanced his broad person between her and them.

"Is't thou, Job?" she said. "I'm lookin' for our Billy, that drotted young rascal. Hasta seed 'im? I want 'im to gang to Langsett; I ha' quite runned out o' salt, an' Sam winna touch a drop nother o' broth nor gruel bawt <sup>1</sup> there's a dollop o' saisonin' in't."

"I hanna seed 'im," said Job.

His cheeks were ashy grey, his eyes bloodshot.

"Then I'll turn again. I ha' traipsed an' trailed t' country while I'm deä-d-beat. But I'll pay him when I light on him, by my saul I will."

But instead of withdrawing directly she went aside, so that the spade and pick came into view and also a plot of ground, some seven feet by two, from which he had shovelled the snow away and dug out the frozen turf.

"What arta agate on now?" she said.

Job did not answer. The unwholesome grey of his cheeks was blanched to an almost white. The likeness of that bared space to the plan of a grave could not escape her. Instantly she had made his folly the gift of a foolish reason.

"Lo thee! thou wants a bonny bit o' turf, I reckon, for to hap t' grave up. But will't grow, think ye? An' I should a tho't thou could a fun some handier nor this. But mebbe thou tho't she'd titter <sup>2</sup> hae it from whoam like. Deä-d folk hae their fancies, I knaw; whilk is nobbut nat'ral. Thou'lt ha' to borry t' cart again. He didn't charge thee oat for't afore, did 'e?"

Job shook his head; it was all he could.

<sup>1</sup> Without.

<sup>2</sup> Sooner.

"No, of coorse not. He'll wrap an' wring wheer there's summat to be gotten, but yo canna squeeze oat out o' noat. Well, I mun goo my ways. Thou hasna heerd no more o' them wild men 'at com to thee at neet an' set upon thee an' robbed thee?" Job shook his head. "They ha' been heerd on, noan so far away nother." Job himself was all of a shake. "It com from t' pock-arr'd packman 'at deals i' stay-laces an' run<sup>1</sup> hollands. He lay at Nix's ower neet, an' t' Sheffielder heerd 'im say, an' he telled Widder Webster; an' t' widder—she's gotten two strings to her bow if no more—she telled Dick Tailyor, an' Dick telled our Sam. Well, they ha' been seed at Langdendale, an' they ha' been seed on Woolley Moor, an' they ha' been seed—t' selfsame day, mind ye—by Huddersfield. Judge for thysel if they could do't by fair means. They say 'at when they catch 'em they can ayther hang 'em for wild men or burn 'em for wis' ins. That's all the choice they'll be allowed. Couldsta own ony of 'em again?"

Job made a sound bewixt grunt and groan which she could take for yes.

"For thou'lt ha' to be chief witness again 'em after they're caught. There wor a great big red-haired un, thou said?"

"Yoi."<sup>2</sup>

"Well, I hope thou'll hae t' pleasure o' seein' 'im hanged. Now I mun goo an' rout out that young raunge-about. I'll bang his banes for 'im. We're in for more coorse weather, I doubt."

It was at such times that Sam's Prudence felt the lack of human intercourse in that wilderness. The nearest person with fully equipped mouth and ears lived at Langsett, a roadless three-quarters of a mile away, with a river between swollen since yesterday above the stepping-stones; so that on this as on many another occasion she was reduced to making a confidant of ten-year-old Phoebe, or even of her husband, the one merely receptive, the other hardly that. When she said, flinging it down

<sup>1</sup> Smuggled.

<sup>2</sup> Yes.

on the dinner-table in the hope of making a sensation, "The near next yo'll hear ull be 'at Job Owlett has gone clane crazy about his Mary," all Phoebe could say was, "How funny it mun feel!" and all Sam did say was, "Ah? Ony more broth i' t' kettle?"

She had to find all the comment herself and nearly all the surprise, could only imagine the lively bandying of ejaculation, question and answer which would have passed between herself and Widow Webster, the half-conscious fabrication of interesting detail, the confusion of cause and effect, the sympathetic heightening of the delicious emotions of wonder, fear, pity and contempt. All the more she needed the stimulus of further espial upon Job. Soon after dinner she again sauntered over the moor, her knitting in her hands, at the proper slack pace of a slattern. Making a half-mile circuit so as to keep out of sight from Job's cottage, she reached the place where she had found him turf-cutting.

He was not there. His digg'ing was left just as she had seen it in the morning, the last spadeful of turf severed but not removed. She came up from the hollow and walked at her usual leisurely pace towards the house. When she had gone about half the distance she saw Job about a quarter of a mile off to the north-west, walking homewards. She quickened her steps so that she reached the cottage a little before him. She tried the door; it was locked. She looked in at the casement of the house-place but could see nothing. That of the chamber was still draped. She lolled against the doorpost and waited for Job, knitting, in no hurry. When he came up she said in her drawling way:

"Hasta took to makkin' t' door, Job, sin t' Highlan' men com?"

"Hae I made it?" He tried the door with a clumsy affectation of surprise. Roland had quietly withdrawn the bolt; the door yielded to his hand. "See thee! Happen t' door stuck a bit wi' t' damp."

"That's just what it were," said Prudence; and Job was much relieved by her being so easily put off. She

left the house door and began talking of the chamber window. "Why haster gotten t' hingings up yit? I'd hae 'em down; they mak t' ouse look so deäd like." Job did not answer; stood on the threshold and did not offer to go in. "I want thee to lend me a tiny wee bit o' salt while to-morrer. That young hound hasna com in yit."

Job entered hastily, fetched the salt bowl from the cupboard and put it into her hands; but not before she had got a footing in the room.

"Here, tak it, bowl an' all." Her eyes were quick with curiosity, so different from the slow taking of her hands. "I'm a-gooi' to flit."

"Thou'rt not a-gooi' to list, Job, arta, just for becos thou'st lost thy feer?"

"If I did?"

"Mon, thou'd fall into t' clukes<sup>1</sup> o' them griesly Highlan' me. They say 'at they ates all t' childer 'at cooms i' their gate. The varry tho't on' 'em maks me all of a dither like there were one on 'em round t' corner. Dosta think there is?"

"Not there!" answered Job, pale and trembling.

"Thou dost. Thou'rt as much afeared on 'em as me."

"What talk, wench!"

"Lo thee!"

"What is't?"

"I tho't I heerd summat. Run an' see. Out o' doors. There's a good un."

Job went, but only just through the door.

"There's noat."

"Nay, but goo a bit funder an' mak sure."

He went a step or two further, but so that he could still see into the house.

"Noat at all, I upho'd thee."

"Well, well, thou'st bin a married mon thyself for a twelmonth, thou doesn't need larnin' what fools women is. Well, I mun goo, afore t' childer pulls t' ouse down

<sup>1</sup> Clutches.



ower their yeds. No langer agone nor yisterday Phoebe, the young besom, broke my brown mug all to flitters."

She went out; she seemed to be really going, but suddenly put her hand to the wall as if for support.

"I do feel funny, some," she said and dropped the bowl; but so as to spill no salt.

"Wae'st heart! what ails thee, wench?"

"'Tis nobbut the tho't o' them parlous men. Fetch me summat to sit on, quick! My knees'll gi' way unner me."

Job fetched a cricket out and thrust it under her just as she was dropping to the ground.

"Look at my honds, how they shak'! An' I feel coked<sup>1</sup> like, as if I couldna breathe."

Certainly her hands shook; and her face was always ready-coloured for a qualm.

"Fetch me a sup o' watter, fresh from t' brook, to weet my brow. I feel like to swoond. I'm co'd like all ower. Quick! But dunnot be lang; I'm afeared to be left."

Job had an underconsciousness that he was being tricked, but he lacked the decision which would have made it active, lacked suppleness to escape from a position contrived for him. He took a bowl and ran to a little gush of water that burst out of the hillside twenty yards from the door. Prudence flew for the inner room. Roland came out of hiding there, but too late to stop her. She entered, and before her astonished eyes was displayed on the bed one of those huge hairy savages whom she had been playing off upon Job. In that dim light he seemed in a horrible way to be alive. His eyes stared at her with a dead likeness to life, his mouth seemed to gape for her, yet there was also the stark terror of death about him. She cried out, turned, rushed past Roland, not heeding him, and fled homeward in no simulated fear. Job returning saw her run, and fell over the salt-bowl in his haste to enter the house. The door to the chamber was wide open.

<sup>1</sup> Choked.

"She has looked in," said Roland.

"Warr<sup>1</sup> an' warr," said Job. "What mun we do now? She knows. An' what she knows she'll tell; an' more."

"We must get out of here as soon as we can."

"I promised 'im I'd bury 'im, an' I will."

"Then it behoves us both to be quick with it."

Twilight was coming on. They might not now wait for the night. Hastily they made their rude funeral preparations. Job tore a broad plank from the side of a rough penthouse which leant against the back of the cottage; that was the bier. They laid the dead man on it, first putting a white cloth over his face to hide that awful simulation of life which the glassy eyes gave it. By his side they placed his claymore. The man and the boy staggered under the terrible burden, but it was no time to give way. As they bore it forth, the moor gently rising before them looked black already against the woolly sky. It was but a journey of a short two furlongs, and Roland's memory kept no record of it save the contradictory impression of a heavy blank. Job had dug that second grave only a few yards from the spot where the dead man had lain and secretly bled. It was behind a slight hump, enough to screen them on the Langsett side and give lodgment to a considerable snow-drift. That narrow shallow trench, banked round by freshly upturned black frozen clods, made a sorry blot on the pure white. They lowered the corpse with an awe-stricken clumsiness, trembling both of them. Job drew Roland a few yards aside, as though he might be overheard, and whispered hoarsely in his ear:

"'Tis a fearsome thing to lay honds to t' mon yo've killed."

He broke off a twig of heather, returned to the grave and dropped it in.

"I did t' same by Mary," he said. "They say 'at rosemary if yo can come by't is best for to mak t' sperrit rest. But they dunnot say 'at rosemary ull bring 'em back."

<sup>1</sup> Worse.

Then he took the spade and began hastily to shovel the earth in. There was craft in his method; he busily heaped earth upon the feet but carefully left the head uncovered. When the filling-in rose so high that it began to appear out of the gloom of the trench, he pushed the spade into Roland's hand, saying:

"Mak a finish o' t' wark whilst I rest mysel."

Roland took a timid spadeful and looked down. At the bottom of the dark hole he saw a little glimmer of white. It was from the cloth that covered the face, but it seemed like the face itself looking up. He felt the same horror as if his spadeful had been meant to choke the breath in living nostrils. He let the spade empty itself into the snow.

"I can't anyhow do it," he said.

"We hanna no time to stand," said Job. "Gie't to me." He took the spade from Roland and shuddered. "A shooful o' black earth is a faw kuss<sup>1</sup> on a mon's mouth." He shut his eyes. "Now tak me by t' hond an' turn me about."

Roland did so.

"Nay," said Job, "it's t' same place; I know it well. Turn me again."

Roland did so.

"Nay," said Job, "'s noan better. I seem to gleg it thorough my eyelids. Turn me about more an' better; twizzle me round twyst; disguise it from me."

Roland turned him twice, and once again.

"Nay," cried Job desperately, "I know he's a-lookin' up at me; I can see his een skimmerin'.<sup>2</sup> Faith an' trawth, 'tis toota uncouth, when a mon canna hinder hissel from seein'."

Such delay was likely to cost them dear. Roland took the spade from him, nerved himself and with open eyes cast a spadeful in, then another and another.

"Forgie 's, poor Highlan' mon," said Job. "Dust to dust, ass to ass."

His eyes came open in his own despite. The glimmer

<sup>1</sup> Foul (ugly) kiss.

<sup>2</sup> Glimmering.

of white at the bottom was blotted out. He received the spade back and soon the pit was filled in, heaped up. A few snowflakes fluttered down and lay, unnoticeable save on that mound of newly turned earth.

"Ay," said Job, "if t' snow ud fall again an' cover wer ugly job we should be all reet. Yet it irks me, poor cratur. T' snow's a co'd, co'd happin'. Howsumever—in sure an' sartain hope o'—summat." He took up spade and pick. "Now coom your ways."

Roland stood for a moment by the graveside with bared head in silence, then turned away and followed his companion over the moor. The snow was already falling fast. Job stood at the open door and looked into the dark house.

"Does't mind thee of oat?" he said.

"Ay," answered Roland.

"It does me. I canna, an' yit I mun."

"We have 'ngered too long already."

"I know that, ower well. But I canna; an' yit I mun."

"What do you want?"

"'Tis on t' chimley-shelf. I allus tho't it favoured her a wee bit."

Roland thought he knew; he entered hastily, struck against the table, overturned a stool, clumsily groping found the chimney, reached up to the shelf, knocked something off with a metallic clatter and something else with a crash of pottery, then laid his hand on what he was in search of and brought it to the door, a paltry chimney ornament, a poor little paint-smudged shepherdess with absurd hoop and beribboned crook.

"That's it!" said Job. "'Tis wunnerful like her; partic'lar t' mouth."

He put it in his pocket, then picked up a small harden bag which he had crammed with such portable property as he most needed or valued, thrust a stake through under the knot and lifted it to his shoulder. Roland took with him nothing of the dead man's but his pistol, powder and shot and the money, which last was only

a partial restitution of what he had been robbed of. The rest of that *donatio pro mortis causa* he had buried with its late possessor.

"Now we're boun' for Wakefield," said Job.

"Is it on the way to Scotland?" asked Roland.

"Ay, sure 'tis."

"How do you know?"

"Nay, I'm noan purtendin' to know. It's that fur off a mon canna be expected to know. I nobbut mane 'tis the way I should choose. If I were forced to choose."

"Where does it lie?"

Job pointed almost opposite to the quarter in which the sun had died wintrily out.

"Then lead on, with the best speed you may."

## CHAPTER XXIX

MERRY WAKEFIELD

Hour after hour they trudged through the increasing snow and darkness across pathless moors; or if there were roads of any sort Job either failed to hit them or purposely avoided them. The only variation in the monotony of toil was the change from the firm and rough to the swampy, or when they had to wade an unbridged stream. Job hardly spoke except now and then to mark their course with a name, apparently more for his own encouragement than his companion's information.

"T' Don, for sartain. Now we goo up again. I wish I were as sure o' t' rest o' t' road."

"Crow Edge, I belave. But I canna see't."

"Whitley Cômmon, mebbe. Onyhow 'tis weet enoo."

"If we be reet, an' I canna say 'at we bain't, Denby should be smack i' front on's."

All along the rising wind disputed the way with them, and the snow joined with the darkness to bewilder their vision, and with the difficulties of the ground, the stony places and the marshy, the pitfalls and swollen watercourses, to harass and ensnare their every step.

Said Job, "We're a lang while a-crossin' t' Huddersfield road. But theer, dang it, I shouldn't know it if I were stannin' on't."

At last they stumbled against a shepherd's shelter, a tiny doorless erection of loose stones thatched with heather.

"Let's snuggle in," said Job, "an' tak shield while we can see dayleet."

It was barely wide enough for the two to squeeze in, and only high enough for crouching or sitting.

"Square thee, brother," said Job, as he followed Roland in. "'Tis narrer," he said, as he settled on his hams; "but not so narrer as—that yonner. Ah well, I mun mind me. Sure an' sartain hope o'—— What were't?"

"Of the insurrection to summat," answered Roland, who thought nothing inconceivable in a Protestant formula.

"That's it; t' insurrection to summat. But wae'st heart-aday, my feer, I doubt I shall forget again, an' that ud be scath. Knowst thou ony way o' ne'er forgettin'?"

"The only way of ne'er forgetting," answered Roland, "is to remember."

They supped on a rye loaf they had brought with them, then rested as well as they could. Job was soon snoring. But Roland though he often repeated the change from crouching to sitting, from sitting to crouching, and maybe lapsed now and then into unconsciousness, never enjoyed that complete disseverance which brings rest. As soon as he could see his knees before him he was glad to push the snow away from the entrance, crawl stiffly forth, stand up and stretch his cramped limbs. Job followed him out yawning. The snow had ceased falling, but it lay on the ground a foot deep. The sky was clear, the moon still high, the wide earth all of a grey white.

Job knew nothing of their whereabouts; they had to go at a venture, taking their northward direction from the moon. There was a singing wind, keen but not blustering. A bright meteor darted across the sky before them.

"Lo thee!" cried Job.

"Ay," said Roland, "'tis a shooting star."

"Nay, 'tis t' poor Highlan' mon's saul a-gooin' up to heaven."

For an hour they plodded through the snow, now up to the waist in a drift, now up to the knee in a bog, then

they saw a little church before them and a few houses, which Job declared to be Denby. There they stopped at the ale-house and ate bread and cheese and drank ale by a sulky just-lighted fire. When they started again it was day, and soon they crossed a rude road.

"That goos to Barnsley," said Job broodingly. "I bought t' ring theer. Gied a crown for't. 'Tis a twel-month coom Valentine's day."

He spoke never a word more until he said, "Yon's High Hoyland church," pointing to a church which appeared very white against a backing of trees high on a hill.

They did not pass through High Hoyland however, but turning aside to the lower ground made their way across a great park that lay about a great house and was well wooded and adorned with a lake, an astonishing contrast to the treeless desolations through which they had been journeying. When they were through that and on higher ground again Job said, "Yon's merry Wakefield!" with a great sigh to help out the adjective. But they had to go many a mile yet through the intervening valley before that high spire was more to them than a distant landmark. On the way as occasion offered they inquired after a horse for Roland, but without success. Night was falling by the time that they had crossed the Ings and come within sight of Wakefield bridge, within hearing of the weir. It seemed a considerable town for those days, and Roland held back from entering.

"Nay, coom thee on," said Job; "nont'll put thee up for t'neet, I'll upho'd thee. They live on t' Softs, just tother side o' t' brig. And mebbe nuncle could tell's of a tit for sale. He's a clothworker by trade but he has a brother as works a farm."

In the end he persuaded Roland to await his return, which he promised should be speedy. The performance however hardly came up to the promise. Roland wearying of standing, gradually drew nearer until he stood upon the bridge. There was nobody about. He



leant against the parapet and watched the flow of the dark river. Its gloom was only broken by the long line of glimmering white that marked the position of the weir, and by the peeping reflection of a solitary star.

He wearied of the river and the roar of its weir. The road into the town was unlighted and unpeopled. He took a score of steps thitherward, and a score more. The roadway was over the ankles in mire and slushy snow, and down the middle of it trickled a tiny brook. Its darkness was hardly touched by the broken firelight or faint rushlight from a few of the mean houses that were irregularly set on either side, and were for the most part as still as they were dark. Only in one of them did he perceive any noticeable concurrence of voices, loud voices they were as if in dispute, and that he passed hastily by. Thus little by little he stole two or three hundred yards up the road, to where the houses were thickly placed and there was a little passing to and fro between them. Then he suddenly remembered himself, and turning again strode quickly down towards the bridge. He had not gone half the distance when he found the road before him occupied by a group of excited talkers. The nearest house was that which he had before remarked as being singularly noisy. It now gave forth the sound of a woman's voice in shrill lamentation and men's voices raised in anger or remonstrance. Children were fighting for vantage ground whence to peep through the keyhole or between the curtains. But what Roland gave attention to was the high-pitched talk of the gossips in the road.

"Why did t' mon coom here?"

"Why? Sure becos he's nevvv to t' woman. He's Sukey Tysack's nevvv Joe from Penistone way."

"Murder, didsta say?"

"Ay, murder and robbery."

"Then howsumdever his feet be set he stans very kittle."

"Whisht! they're off wee 'm to t' kid-cote."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The town lock-up.

For the door of the house was opening, and it let out a man bearing a constable's staff. The light was enough for Roland's fear-sharpened senses to see that, and also to see two other men following him with Job between them handcuffed. He turned back and hurried up the street, greatly afraid, into the thick of the town. The open shop-fronts lighted the road. There was much chaffering that Saturday night between aproned shopmen and shawled women over joints of meat and rolls of cloth. But men or women, Roland saw them as possible accusers, captors. He went round two sides of the high-steepled church, but only felt it as something impending. He was right glad when with a change almost sudden he gained a broad and quiet street, where there was no buying or selling, no loungers and hardly a passer; where the houses were larger and fewer, frowned upon the common road with the superciliousness of a porch, stood off from it were it only a yard or two, fenced themselves with an air of reserve, even walled themselves off with somewhat of haughtiness. But as he passed one such house—it had a porch but only the nominal separation of posts and chain—the door was wide open and the light from the hall fell upon two persons who stood on the top step of a flight of four.

"Tell him 'tis our quarter sessions next week and I shall be too busy at court."

Roland looked up and saw a portly elderly gentleman who was speaking to a thin formal clerklike man, while he drew on his second shammy glove and settled his double chin into his comfortable neckcloth before venturing down into the inclemency of the street. His garb—moderate tie-wig, hat of a modest cock and snuff-coloured roquelaure—was of a prim scrupulosity which was gently bantered by the jauntiness of his eyes.

"Ha' ye finished engrossing the lease and release, *re* Hodges to Wainwright, against to-morrow?"

"Ay, sir."

"Don't forget to tell Watson we can't gie him longer than while Monday."

The clerk shut the door and went in. Roland gathering that the chief speaker was a lawyer had checked his haste, had hung back. All at once he had realized his desperate need of advice, and he was taken by the gentleman's appearance. He turned and stopped him at the foot of his steps.

"Are you a lawyer, sir?" he said. "Forgive the question."

"The question shall not only be forgiven but answered," said the gentleman. "I am a lawyer by vocation and Strawbenzie by name."

"Then, sir, I would fain have your advice."

Roland felt the attorney's eyes over-glance him with a certain curiosity, perhaps doubt.

"I can pay for it," he added.

"On those terms my advice is always in season and on sale. Come in hither."

Mr. Strawbenzie led him into the house, took off his outdoor attire in the hall, turned by a glazed door into a shabby office, where the clerk was busily scratching with a quill, nose on paper, and saw nothing. Passing through he ushered him into his private room and shut the door. It was a room so small that lawyer and client might have sat in opposite corners and yet held confidential talk. Its furniture consisted of a writing-table, a couple of chairs, a fire-guard and a coal-box. There was besides of course a book-case sparsely furnished with books bound in dingy sheep-skin, shelving laden with sombre deed-boxes, and on the table a methodical litter of tape-bound documents. The attorney stirred the coal-fire into a blaze, and bade Roland draw a chair up on one side of it while he took the other, saying:

"You seem to have dreed some coarse weather lately."

Roland looked away from him into the fire, sombrely pondering how to begin.

"Well, young sir? I do not seek to pee<sup>1</sup> into what consarns neither your case nor my opinion, but since you ask for my advice you invite me to ask for your confidence."

His direct look was expressive of a genial acuteness, as far from hardness as from softness, and Roland determined to tell him—just as much as he was obliged.

"I will try," said he, "to make myself understood, while not forgetting that the matter is not altogether my own property. 'Tis indeed mainly another man's."

"Ah?"

"Yes, sir. And he has been taken up in your town; ay, not half an hour ago."

"Upon what charge, prithee?"

"I do not know that I can properly say. But anyhow 'tis like to be a much heavier charge than the most he's guilty of."

"He is innocent belike?"

"Ay, truly."

"And has good witnesses to that?"

"Himself and me."

"If this charge mount up to so much as felony you may put himself aside."

"But 'tis to himself, sir, I shall wish to leave him, for in truth 'twill be mighty inconvenient for me to remain here but this one night."

"Then his affairs stand very tickle, for a person upon his trial for felony is not competent to gie testimony on his own behalf."

"What am I to do?"

It was not so much a question as a cry. Mr. Strawbenzie reached out to his desk, took a folded sheet of paper from one of the pigeon-holes and opened it before his eyes.

"You have a call to be gone hence?"

"I have."

"A peremptory call?"

"Ay, most peremptory."

<sup>1</sup> Pry.

While the attorney was so deliberately questioning his eyes were by turns upon the paper and Roland's person, as though he were comparing the writing on the one with the writing on the other.

"Maybe I yet hold only the loose end o' this business, but my advice, based upon such data as I have afore me, is that you mind that call."

"And tother man?"

"On what foot are you with him? Are you anyways bounden to him?"

"Yes, he has no help save in me."

"Fie! that's toota common a bond to have so particular an effect."

"I cannot leave him to die."

"An ox must not fatch<sup>1</sup> himself with many onters<sup>2</sup> about a hoss. What is the worst that can behappen you if you tender his interests to the scath o' your own?"

Roland did not answer. The attorney rose and took a book from the case, a volume of Wood's *Institutes*, the first that offered itself to his hand, then said:

"Well, afore I put the clinch to my advice I must have a quiet quarter of an hour myself alone to compare precedents and weigh opinions. For so long a term, with your permission, I leave you to your own company."

He went out into the clerk's office, but immediately returned with a printed paper in his hand, which he gave to Roland, saying:

"Maybe you hanna seen the *Leeds Mercury* for last Tuesday. If so, I doubt not you'll find matter in't at least as amusing as the backs o' my books."

He went to a buffet or small corner cupboard, took thence a decanter of port wine and a glass, which he filled and presented to Roland, then again withdrew. The *Mercury* was a twopenny dish of stale broken meat from the London newspapers, and Roland glanced over its columns with a slack attention while he sipped the

<sup>1</sup> Harass.

<sup>2</sup> Scruples.

wine, warmed his legs and forgot as much as he could. Thus he arrived by the zigzag of haphazard at a single paragraph of local news, set out with as little method as the cursory tattle of the tea-table; an assembly ball at York, the health of the Countess of Oxford, the wreck of a fishing-smack off Filey Brigg. But suddenly his wandering attention was glued to an item of quite other interest.

"Roland Surety, the Sherwood Forest murderer, is believed to be now in hiding in the West Riding. His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, being Lord Warden of the Forest, has been pleased to offer a reward of £20 for his apprehension."

He was seized by a horrible throttling fear, as though he felt his footing give way under him and had lost all hold upon earth but by a rope about his neck. He sat incapable of action or even impulse; until he heard a door open noisily somewhere in the house. That brought him to his feet. The loud door might be letting in blood-money hunters upon him; he saw the street full of pursuers. He thought to escape by the window, which gave upon a paved yard. His hand was already upon the casement fastener when Mr. Strawbenzie re-entered.

"What ails ye?" he said. "D'ye feel a fit o' the qualms?" He filled the wine-glass again. "Drink that off; 'twill do ye a power more good than the nip of the outside air, which is more unfriend than friend to all but the brute kind. That's well. Now sit again. How d'ye feel now?"

"Better, thank ye."

"'Twas that sudden incoming from frost to fire turned ye mazy. I myself suffer a like disturbance from the same cause. And as you see, I keep the specific against it handy. Ha' ye read the news? I wish we don't grow to have warr news from Scotland."

Whether through the natural return of his courage or the operation of the stimulant or the attorney's perfect composure and the stillness of house and street, one or

all of these, that buzz in the ears left him, so that he heard his adviser's next words distinctly.

"Well, young sir, as to your own case my opinion has nowise shifted on a more leisured consideration. 'Tis not reasonable that you be required to make your necessity jee<sup>1</sup> with another man's conveniency. I might cite precedent and propound argument at length, but I can well see that you're a lad o' sense and modesty who won't demand to be painfully persuaded to your good. Besides any arguing would in a sense war with my conclusion; which is that you save your awn bacon, and since you admit a peremptory call do obey that call instanter. And now, if I have gi'en you all the light you need, I must beg you to excuse me. When you first addressed me I was setting forth to an appointment whilk e'en then wanted very little of being owerdue."

Roland rose and let himself be led to the door and ushered forth. He was altogether of the attorney's opinion and eager to set his face once more in the direction of Scotland, and if not safety at least an open peril. He walked swiftly on up the road in the same direction as before, and soon had exchanged the sullied snow of the town for an expanse of pure white. He had walked fully an hour with no aim but of making the distance greater between himself and Wakefield, when suddenly, without any apparent lead, there thrust itself in between the jostle of his thoughts the recollection that he had not paid the attorney the market price of his learned counsel. He forthwith turned back and in less than an hour again stood on the attorney's doorstep. The attorney had returned and on his asking came into the hall to him, but seemed much put out when he saw who it was, and especially when he learnt the cause of his return.

"Pugh, pugh!" he said with Roland's guinea piece open on his palm. "Isn't there such thing to your knowledge as the king's post? I weened you had been by this a good eight mile on the road whither your

<sup>1</sup> Agree.

extreme urgent business compels you. You appear to me, young man, to have mighty little consideration for your legs."

The answer whereto, if answer there was, was cut off by a knock at the door. The attorney opened, and a man's deep rough voice was heard to say :

"I ha' come, sir, about backing t' warrand 'at t' messenger from Nottinghamshire has bro't. Squire Dunston warn't in, an'——"

"Ah, you, Newberry? Come in, man. What weather 'tis, surely! But afore I hear one word o' business gang down into the kitchen and bid Mary thaw your voice with a pint pot of October."

"Yo're varry kind, sir, but I were bidden mak' haste to turn again, for——"

"Tut, man! Lawful business, whilk is to say legal business, was never hindered by reasonable refreshment. How long w'll't tak ye to lay another pint cheek by jowl—I had better ha' said paunch cum belly—with that you laid in at the 'Bull' on your way?"

Newberry may have blushed; he made no audible reply. The attorney opened the door wide; Roland was cornered in between it and the wall. A tall rough-looking man entered in a big slouched hat.

"Pass on, Newberry, pass on. You know the way, I trow; no need for gentleman usher."

Newberry passed on, doffing his hat, and the sound of his snow-deadened boots soon ceased along the passage. The attorney took silver from his breeches' pocket, wherefrom he selected a groat and put it into Roland's hand.

"Seven shillings. Did you mark that tall fellow as he went through?" He added two crowns to the groat. He did not seem to notice that Roland had not answered, nor yet that he was pale and his hand shook. "Seventeen shillings. Do you happen to know him?"

"No."

Yet Roland's fear of that no made it a half yes. The pile in his shaking hand was increased by a half-crown.



"Nineteen shillings and sixpence. 'Tis our deputy. A worthy fellow, a good ding-thrift, an excellent toss-pot. He has much on his hands just now, what with warrants of our own and other counties. I foresee heavy jail-deliveries at the next assizes. Sixpence makes twenty shillings. Fie on sus. per col.! 'Tis a toota compendious—I might ha' said suspendious—addition to 'hic jacet.' And another shilling completes the total. I'm sorry you considered yourself bounden to this return. Your obleeged sarvant, sir. It wants a quarter of seven and the moon won't be up of three hours or more, but the snow-light will mark ye the road out almost as clear as by day. I hope your business won't carry you by York; 'tis said that deep drifts block the way thither. Besides there's a ruck o' sojers there just now, whilk makes inn-room extraordinary dear."

As the attorney spoke he opened the door. Roland made no reply but the proper good-night; his thoughts were already upon the road, the long white lonely night-road. He did not walk, he ran. He could not breathe freely in the same place with a constable who held a Nottinghamshire warrant. But he loathed the idea of another iteration of that long monotonous road. At the first offer he turned to the right down a narrow lane, which took him straight out of the town.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE CROSS-ROADS

At length his pace dropped to an unwilling walk. It was a clear still frosty night and the crackle of the snow under his tread was the only sound; there was nobody about. But after a long while two horsemen rode up behind. He bethought himself that he had need to inquire what road he was on. He turned, put up his hand and begged them to stop. Apparently they were in one mind to take him for a footpad, for at the same instant each struck terrified heels into his horse's flanks and started off at a gallop. The one horse over-turned him, the other's hoofs smote the ground within an inch of his head. He got up little hurt, and walked on musing of the dangers of the way, real and imaginary. Soon he espied a forlorn little hovel, mud with a tangled thatch, nipped between the roadway and a high hedge. He knocked at the crazy door, knocked thrice, but getting no answer lifted the latch and peeped in. The only light came from a smouldering fire, and dimly visible by it was a cowering human form which showed no face. Not daring to mention Scotland he asked whither the road led whereon he stood. Only at a second and louder asking did a voice wake up to an answer, a man's harsh surly voice.

"To Aberford. To York. To hell."

It roused an echo of the lawyer's obscure warning against York, hardly heard at the time. He walked on, but "to York, to hell" was ever in his thoughts, and he took the first opportunity to escape into a by-road. In less than a mile he was stopped by a river and turned back to a little ale-house near by. He did not much like the churlish landlord's looks and manners nor yet his

company—there were a lot of grimy colliers drinking noisily in the only public room—but since there was nothing better he put up there for the night. He inquired of the innkeeper if he knew of a good roadster for sale. The innkeeper knew of just such a one as he needed, but surlily reminded him that they were now at the end of the week and declared that his principles were Church of England and “again hoss-dealing of a Sunday.”

“I can’t lie here another night,” said Roland. The landlord began reaffirming his principles with an oath. “But I don’t mind paying for two.”

The landlord, dropping at once his principles and bad language, consented to so happy a compromise between his customer’s haste and his own religion.

Early next morning, which was fine and frosty, Roland paid his double scot, got ferried over the river, followed the innkeeper’s directions and at a village a mile and a half further on found a farmer who had a gelding for sale. It was a good honest brown-coated plodder, aged, and for that with a second-hand harness thrown in, which was still serviceable though by no means showy, he paid seven guineas. He inquired the way to York, and was bidden ride straight forward through Castleford. Instead of doing so he rode back a little way and took a turn which he had noted before, to his left hand as he was now going.

He had advanced about a mile and was nearing a largish village with a colliery in the neighbourhood, when he heard shouting and fast riding behind him. Looking back he saw that he was being followed by a man on horseback who was calling and beckoning to him. He tried to make believe not having seen or heard and rode on at a quickened pace. The man behind followed faster and shouted louder. He had nothing in mind but that terrible Nottinghamshire warrant with a West Riding backing. He made as good work as he could with whip and heel—he was sorry that he had no spurs to them—and went skeltering through the

astonished village at a heavy gallop with more clatter than speed. His pursuer however, being much better mounted, gained on him rapidly as they dashed down the frozen hillside. At the bottom a brook crossed the road, and a flock of geese was waddling by its side in unexpectant dignity. In an instant they and their dignities were separated, scattered. Loudly they forth-trumpeted their terror and their indignation. The startled horse struck fire out of the stones. But Roland soon understood that he had no chance in a trial of pace, and they seemed to be approaching another village. As the road rose again he reined up—he did not forget that he had the orator's pistol in his coat-pocket, loaded—and begged to know of his pursuer what he wanted with him.

"I think you might very well have asked me that question sooner," answered the other somewhat huffily.

He was a very respectable sober-suited man, neither farmer nor squire, but if a tradesman certainly in a good way. He explained that as he went through Altofts he had been begged by a farmer who had seen Roland start altogether wrong for York to overtake him and put him right. Roland thanked him shamefacedly and lamely apologized. He had heard so much of highway-men.

"What? In the villages and by day? You have not the look of so timorsome a lad."

Roland said, but not directly to the question, that he was not travelling to York; he had only asked out of curiosity.

"Then I wish to the deuce that I had not risked my horse's knees down Normanton Hill. But where then are you going, if I may ask?"

"Straight forward, sir—for the present."

Again Roland's answer had halted. The other looked at him curiously, suspiciously; said, "Your road appears to be the same as mine—for the present; but my horse is better than yours, I believe, so I bid ye

good-day;" then trotted ahead and was soon out of sight over the brow of the ascent.

The church bells were chiming when Roland, having ridden to the top of a hill, came into sight of a small town. He stopped on the outskirts and inquired the road to York.

"Straight on to Ferrybrig; then turn to t' left," he was told.

But he turned to the right at once and rode aside avoiding York. He had lost the enthusiasm which would have sped him to London, had put aside the steady principle which had been taking him to Scotland; he had but one aim now, to save his own skin. By a slow descent he went down into a plain. Mile after mile he rode, and the country became absolutely flat, a region without landmark, river drowned, almost trackless; here and there at wide intervals a sleeping village, for the rest a mere table for the snow to lie upon. He stopped to bait at a lonely ale-house, and when he mounted again asked as usual the way to York; then giving it his left hand rode by.

The day had clouded and the sun went down in a bloodshot greyness, went down and left him to the stillness and his thoughts. His horse's hoofs made no sound upon the untrodden snow. The wind was nothing but when listened for, and was then a mere hiss. The sky appeared as greyly white and as still as the earth. What cold glimmer of light got about seemed to be earthborn and to come up ghostlike from the snow. He rode on far into the night; how far he knew not. The road was a narrow pack-horse causeway raised a little above the surrounding flat.

The waning moon gave no sign until long after her registered hour. But as night went on there must have arisen some little stir among the packed clouds, for every now and then a weak place would let her wan shine pass through, or a break in them would for a few moments compel her to a jealous half-discovery of her pallid disfigured face. Also from time to time some pale star

would peep timidly forth and immediately draw back. Many a drowsy mile he rode and only once saw face of man, when a gang of ruffianly smugglers went by with a train of pack-horses and pushed him from the road into the marsh that bordered it. They took no notice of him but rode on whipping their team up, and at their departure the new stillness seemed doubly still. Save that once he saw no human being, and if he passed by any human habitation it was less than a dream. At last he came to what seemed a considerable village built round a spacious green and dowered with trees. He would gladly have stopped there for the remainder of the night, but there was no sound or movement, no light in any window, no sign of life. He passed through. On his right hand there was now a great wood or park whose tall trees darkly vaulted the road.

Suddenly he saw on his left hand close beside the white road, and apparently raised a little above it, a something dark that was not a road, for it moved and had a voice, nay, voices, loud uneasy disputative voices, as of a great flow of waters. It disturbed him; for these waters were somehow at contention. The sound of them, ay, and their very selves seemed alternately to come on and fall back. There was a little quickening of the breeze; it made a buzz in the trees overhead. He was conscious too, as it met his face, of something unusual in the air, a fresh-smelling moistness that was strange to him. It was not by any means unpleasant, but being so strange and in the night too it troubled him. He had heard of the sea of course though only at second-hand—his mother had never seen it—and somehow he thought of the sea. But no, this was not the sea; beyond that strip of turbulent dark he saw the same white immobility extend as formed its hither border.

The clouds had parted again about the moon, for a broken reflection of it appeared amid the black swirl of waters; a floating face of glistening white, a drowning face, distorted, with a sort of suicidal horror on it,

quickly submerged and seen no more. The flood was again all dark; yet a dark varied with less dark, dappled with shifty glimmerings, streaked with shadows, perplexed with eddies, crossed by suggestions, disappearances, uncertainties. But he left seeing it as abruptly as he had first seen it. He still rode in the shadow of the trees, but on his left hand was nothing but a flat of grey-white. At last the wood fell away. He came out again into the white silence, the unbounded distances. As he rode he looked back and tried to see between the dreams that he had been dreaming on horseback. He had seen a river on his left—that was well-nigh clear to him—but before that had he not also seen for a little while the gleam of a phantom river on his right?

He was in truth being penned in between two tidal floods. Though he could not know it, in some measure he felt it, perhaps at the suggestion of that unusual quality in the air; felt that he was at last being brought to account, that presently he would have to turn back or else take an irrevocable step forward. Still the wind whispered stealthily, then listened with held breath; whispered, listened. Still he rode on and on through the recordless night. Until his horse stopped short. He had come to a fork in the road. The moon was again showing its ghastly distorted face, and the cloud-web about it shot through with its own rays was like hair on end. But it was not that which made his own hair stand prophetically erect before he quite knew why.

High up between white road and pallid moon, abominably clear and black, was a sort of iron cage hanging from the projecting arm to a lofty post, and therein a something grotesquely and horribly yet indisputably human. It was a gibbeted malefactor. The apish head was writhen into a dead grin; one of the legs had rotted off; its clothing hung in filthy shreds, the burlesque of bedizenment, at once hideous and ludicrous. The shrivelled arms hugged a fowling-piece, the instrument doubtless of a crime. The moon peered over the thing's

left shoulder like horror looking on; peered and paled and swooned away. Then the darkening landscape seemed to fade spectrally from the gibbet, leaving only that real before him.

He sat motionless, frozen. He made out a resemblance in what was before him to Job; Job as he would be; through him. The silence was intolerable; for the hiss of the breeze was less a sound than a suggestion. So the not hearing and the seeing were alike terrible. If he could have closed his eyes to the one he would have covered his ears against the other. But bound fast to his terror as in a nightmare, he sat and looked and listened.

At length, perhaps in a second or two, perhaps in an hour—for time stood still, as though it too were horror-bound—at length with a somewhat stronger puff of wind the bars of the involving cage creaked. In his seizure he took it for the rusty recommencement of long-forgotten speech within that throttled weazand. Hand and heel regained a convulsive activity; he turned about. He did not realize at once that his horror was behind him; but his horse, as if well pleased with the change of direction, trotted briskly back along the way that they had come. His rider left the reins slack, made no decision. He only knew that he could not return and pass that gibbet.

A freshening breeze blew upon his back and the clouds began to give way. So he went under the trees, skirted the river, traversed the village and again came out into the wide waste. Then there opened before him a space of clear sky, which displayed to his awestruck eyes with a magnificence that no pomp ecclesiastical of gold and gems ever approached the starry outline of a huge cross. Lowly at its foot blazed the prince of the fixed stars, its head was gemmed with the delicate radiance of a band of three, at its wide-stretched arms shone Betelgeuse and Rigel. He stopped his horse and gazed. Many a time of a winter's night he had seen and doubtless admired the constellations that glorify that quarter



of the heavens, but he had never had them separated into such a significance for himself. He accepted the august comforting sign, dismounted and knelt in the snow before it. When he mounted again, if his difficulties were as great his care was much less. The clouds which had disclosed the token soon hid it again, but he rode keeping his mind's eye on it all the rest of the way.

Half-way between midnight and sunrise he knocked them up at a poor solitary inn, went straight to bed and slept, as he had not done since he set out for Derby, with a mind free for the time being at least from all self-contention. He did not wake till the afternoon. Then as he lay he heard two sounds which seemed equally faint and far-off; the patter of soft rain upon the casement and the chime of bells from some distant village. "'Tis Sunday," he thought to himself; "'tis raining; there will be no travelling to-day." He turned over and was asleep again before he had had time to ask himself what o'clock it was, or to reflect that it was not Sunday but Monday and the feast of the Epiphany. It was hunger rather than restlessness that at last fetched him out of bed—and by then it was fully night—to a breakfast-supper of pan-pudding, a slab of thick pancake with a few bits of bacon in it.

He rose not very early next day, breakfasted at his ease, did not hurry his setting-off. He still seemed to leave the direction to his horse, riding with slack reins, and that though it had frozen sharp in the night after rain and a partial thaw, so that the roads in many places were as slippery as glass. Sometimes he had to dismount and go afoot, but even then it was not apparent whether he was leading the horse or the horse him. It was well into the night before he reached the village where he had bought the horse, and there he put up at a fairly good inn.

He was in the saddle next morning before he asked the landlord whither that road would take him if he kept straight on.

"To Leeds," answered the landlord.

"And if after a while I turn to the right I shall arrive at York?"

"Ay," said the landlord.

"And if to the left that brings me to—Wakefield?"

He had almost said "the gallows."

"E'en so," said the landlord; "and a good journey to ye, maister, ony gate."

So far Roland had let his horse go as he would. Thenceforth it behoved him to take the mastery on himself. It was but just grey twilight when he set out. As long as it was light enough to see the way it was all the same to him. He did not know if it rained or was fine, froze or thawed; the weather was nothing to him. He rode down to the Calder, which he crossed in a boat while his horse swam in the wake. So he kept on at a sober pace, neither hurried nor slack, until he came to the highway by which he had left Wakefield. There he must needs decide. Thitherto, so far as he understood himself, he had deferred decision. To the right was York, to the left Wakefield, straight forwards Leeds. He stood there, seconds, minutes, hours, days, years—spirit-time cannot be measured by the secular clock—in such disturbance as when he was under the gibbet; but now it was himself as it seemed who hung there, hung and grinned back on himself. He stood, but knew all through the tangles of his terror that he would have to choose betimes—onwards, to the right, to the left—or the power of choice would pass from him. At length, in a little while or a long, it became more dreadful to him to be caught dallying or riding away or even to escape uncaught than to go voluntarily to captivity and death. He lifted his bowed head, braced himself up, crossed himself before that imaginary gibbet, forehead and breast, as if before the altar, then pulled the near rein strongly and used the whip. For of all directions that left turn, it would seem, was the one to which his nag had the most objection. But the objection once overcome with due use of heel and whip, he rode to Wakefield at a business-like speed.

He called at Mr. Strawbenzie's, asked to see him and was told that he was at the quarter sessions at the moot-hall. He found his way to the moot-hall, which was built on a colonnade over the market-cross. He left his horse with one of the loiterers without, and taking his directions went under the colonnade and up a circular staircase in the centre. This brought him to a shabby room dimly lighted from a turret in the roof and having at the farther end a table, by which two magistrates sat in such state as an arm-chair each could make for them. But the first thing he noticed was the attorney sitting just before them. Mr. Strawbenzie's eyes fell on him as he entered and seemed to frown him back. 'But the frown was lost on him, for immediately he caught sight of Job Owlett, who was just leaving the room. Job looked pale, agitated, bewildered, and Newberry, the tall deputy, had him by the arm; might be supporting, might be securing him. Roland went up to him and said:

"Job, I've come to bear witness for you."

Job looked round and his face lightened up.

"Is't thee, lad?" he said. "Dunnot gie me the wate<sup>1</sup> if I didn't keep touch wi' thee. I ha' bin in a mucky pickle these three days, but——"

"Who are you, sirrah?" asked one of the magistrates sharply. "What is your name?"

Said the attorney, who was evidently clerk to the justices, "Since the prisoner has been discharged, sir, 'twould seem to be unnecessary for you to fatch yourselves wi' this youngster's superfluous testimony."

"Unnecessary or no," said the justice tartly, "I reopen the case. Of course, sir, not without your consent."

Raising his hat he bowed to his coadjutor on the bench and was bowed back to. This second justice was old and meagre and in a full-bottomed tie-wig, which covered his shoulders and left little to be seen of his face but a very thin nose. The speaker, who was stout,

<sup>1</sup> Blame.

red-faced and middle-aged, looked very much of a country beau in his small well-powdered bag-wig, frilled shirt and tight-fitting silver-laced coat. His muff lay upon the table beside him. He sniffed snuff peremptorily from a gold-mounted tortoise-shell box. Probably he had just had an argument with his clerk in which he had been the loser.

"What is your name, sirrah?" he said again with his pinch but half consumed.

Mr. Strawbenzie produced a silver snuff-box and took a pinch. But while justice and clerk sniffed against one another, Roland between the asking and the answering suffered the compressed bulk of all the terrors which had occupied him from Job's arrest to that decisive turn of the road, the terrors without the doubts. After that momentary interval given to anguish he answered quite audibly:

"Roland Surety."

Newberry leapt to his side and laid a hand on him.

"Then, my fine fellow," he said, "I hae a scrap o' paper i' my pocket 'at consarns ye."

"Let be, constable," said the clerk. "Bring him forward and gie him the testament."

But we need not dwell upon Roland's testimony. Job had already been discharged upon the ground that the Highlander unknown was a rebel in arms against the King's majesty, and as such beyond the protection of the law. The new evidence unnecessarily confirmed the magistrates' former decision, and the witness had imperilled his own neck to no purpose. As soon as he came out of the box he was arrested upon a charge of murder; arrested, formally charged and committed all in a few minutes. By then the terror had passed into a stony indifference. The session was ended; the magistrates rose. Job, mightily confounded, wished to recompense one good turn with another.

"Maisters," he cried after the departing court, "lemme kuss t' book an' see if I canna swear to summat 'at 'll do t' poor lad some good."

Mr. Strawbenzie, who was passing out, tapped him on the shoulder and spoke in his private capacity.

"Nay, this is neither the time nor the place. If you hae any evidence to offer come to my office and I'll durse<sup>1</sup> it up for ye."

Then Job turned to Roland.

"Lad," he said, "I'm main sorry for thee. A jail's a dreigh place to lig in; 'tis sorrow a-top of ony sorrow whatsomever."

They led Roland away to prison, Job accompanying him. On the way Mr. Strawbenzie's clerk overtook him and asked him if he had any friend whom he wished to communicate with.

"No," he said, "I have only one, and I would give all I have and hope so as she should never know of this."

The jailor came out of his house, chased away the boys who were playing at ball in the little prison-yard, opened the tiny one-roomed prison-house to Roland and ironed him securely, ankles and wrists, as the gravity of the charge demanded.

"Good luck t' ye, brother," said Job with tears in his eyes. "Faith an' trawth, I wouldna goo if they'd lemme stop wi' thee. But they winna, so I'll e'en goo my ways back to Midhope. I canna sleep nowheer else; and nont and nuncle ull look sideways at me, I doubt, after all this to-do."

Job being pushèd forth went slowly away, and Roland was locked up in his cold dark solitary cell with nothing to sit on but a stone, nothing to lie on but a little straw, nothing to occupy him but the sorry amusement of his despair.

<sup>1</sup> Dress.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### LONG EXPECTED UNEXPECTED

MISTRESS ANN rode to Hathersage in state on one of the duke's horses and escorted by half a score of his servants. She however stayed with her relatives there but one night and then returned home. Immediately after the sisterly kiss and the proper "I hope you're in no worse health than when last I saw you, Sister Alliott," before even she doffed her outdoor garments, she said to her sister :

"Niece Fortuna has been vilely used."

"How lo ; have you been of that opinion?" said Mistress Alliott.

"Twenty hours—twenty years."

"Which?"

"I don't know; both."

"Why did you not say so before?"

"I was a coward; and we women make a virtue, almost a religion of our cowardice. It is to us what a man's courage is to him. The man either fights or excuses himself, whichever is the easier. Fortuna's gallant chose to fight. The woman can neither fight nor excuse herself, she must sit mum, a target for every roving shot. I have thought it out; and time enough in these twenty hours—twenty years. He is Mr. Justice Bond now, they tell me, so if the poor boy were taken——"

"I pray Jesus and His Blessed Mother he be not taken."

"If he were, his father might have the crowning satisfaction of hanging him."

"Ann! you might use your fine wits to better purpose than imagining horrors."

"I will; I'll take 'em with me to-morrow and go visit

Fortuna and comfort her with news of her son. But I will do it in form."

"Ah, 'tis the idea of that which has flushed you up so. I began to be afraid you were out of order again."

"I never felt more like living to Aunt Biddy's age. I'll go forthwith and bid Thomas ready the coach."

"It is already done. The outside has been swilled down, the floor well scrubbed, the hangings brushed, the cushions beaten and aired."

"For what purpose?"

"To serve you, since you need it. But I shall be obliged if you will be so good as to carry me with you."

"You'd be a good deal cool with her, sister Alllott."

"I'll not be anything with her, sister Ann. I shall drive on and leave you at the door."

Mistress Ann bent her keen eyes upon her sister; and said presently:

"I smell a rat! You are going to do your duty to that Gipsy thing. My nose cannot sure have played me so vilely false." Mistress Alllott making no reply, she said again but not at once, "I shall at least be showing civility to a person of quality."

"I shall be rankly disappointed," answered Mistress Alllott, "if the other woman be not a person of many qualities."

"You talk like a low creature. I hold that no qualities make up for lack of quality."

"Whatever my opinion thereupon I am unable to express it with so fine a brevity; therefore I'll say nothing, but while you retire to put yourself under the hands of your woman, I will go see what additions can be hastily made to our usual tea-drinking fare."

By eight o'clock next morning the coach was brought round, an ancient unwieldy ill-hung ramshackle vehicle whose roominess only seemed to give it the more space for discomfort. Half a dozen big-boned Scarsdale blacks were harnessed thereto. Besides the coachman and William on the box and a postilion on one of the leaders there were two footmen behind armed with

blunderbusses. The ladies had Mistress Alliot's maid inside with them. There is no need to detail their various accidents by the way; how a trace broke and the pole snapped; how they were bogged in sloughs, stuck fast in ruts and engulfed in pits; all that was the commonplace of winter travelling in those times. But they reached Alfreton, eight miles off, soon after noon and baited there. Having been that way before they knew there was not even the name of a direct carriage road thence to Kirkby. They were obliged to go round through Sutton, by what was called the Mansfield road. They missed their way over Normanton common and again at Fullwood; but in spite of all they did the last seven miles in less than as many hours, reached Sutton as curfew was being tolled and put up for the night there at a poorish inn.

After the ladies had rested and refreshed themselves with tea or stronger cordials of their own finding and such solids as the house could supply, Mistress Alliot sent for the landlord and began to question him about the forest, its position, size, timber, fauna and flora. The landlord, a dull rough-tongued man, whose human smell was overpowered by an inveterate compound odour of horse, cow, pig, ale and tobacco, tired of her inquisitiveness before he was half milked, and proposed that she should send for Davy Peach, the new keeper, who was living in his native place until he got a house at Kirkby.

"Which I don't know as he ivver will, for a parish naterally don't care to let a furren working-man with a big fam'ly and more than a promise o' more git a settle-ment among 'em."

With the ladies' leave the landlord went himself and fetched Davy. The keeper proved to be a long-legged knock-kneed soft-spoken man, whose glib tongue ran ahead of Mistress Alliot's first question and was never properly overtaken by the subsequent ones. In the end the ladies wearied, not so much of asking as of being answered. Mistress Alliot had put half-a-crown in his



hand and invited him to drink their health in the best that the house provided; it was therefore as an after-thought that she asked him if there were any highway-men in the neighbourhood.

"No, my lady," he answered; "I don't think the forest ivver was clearer on 'em nor what 'tis at present. In a gen'ral way I don't think yo could find such a thing nigher nor the gret north road. There mebbe a muzzy farmer knocked o' th' 'ead now an' again ridin' home from market of a dark night; but that might happen anywheer. I've heerd tell o' plazen——"

"Except for farmers," said Mistress Ann, "you consider the country quite safe?"

"Why not, my lady? There's been nubbut one clear case sin' I've been keeper, an'——"

"What do you mean by a clear case?"

"Gentleman's head fun blowed to smithers an' his hat missin'. But——"

"How long have you been keeper?" asked Mistress Alliott hastily.

"I were registered Christmas was a month. I got the 'pointment when poor Abel got the bag; him as Roly Surety put out the road." The ladies paled. "Ah, it's that what has fritted ye, I can see, but that hadn't noat at all to do wi' them. There's a many jobs laid again decent highwaymen, as when yo comed to the bottom on 'em, y' ud find 'em like hisn to be nubbut just bloody murdersome murder."

Mistress Alliott tried to stop him by assuring him that such a thing was not in her thoughts.

"Yo're i' th' raight on't, ma'am. The lad Roly mebbe was a poacher and deer-stalker, but he hain't nivver hed the standing of a highwayman; as' ronk a purley-man as any i' th' forest. But when they've nabbed him they'll saddle back accounts wi' the same rope as——"

Mistress Ann put her hands to her ears; Mistress Alliott said "Stop, fellow!" so peremptorily that the man's gab was clean cut off just above a joint.

"I have other things to ask and the hour grows late," she said more calmly. "We may take it that there are

no highwaymen within your bounds, but are there no Gipsies?"

"And they are worse," exclaimed Mistress Ann withdrawing hand from ear.

"I can't deny, my lady, but what there's mostly a gang or two on 'em on the forest i' summer, drabbit 'em; but this time o' year if they can't find a cave to shelter theirsens they come nigh-hand th' housen wheer there's some oad barn or shed handy. Anyhow they'd do no more hurt to such ladies as yoursens than m'appen diddle yer out'n a shilling or two with a tale about husbands and legacies. Besides they——"

"Then you are quite free from them at present?"

"There's a big lot on 'em at Beskwood; I could see the smoke o' their fires all the way from Cock's moor. There'd m'appen be three or four score on 'em; for I lay it to be Bo<sup>c</sup>'ell's gang. But that's nine mile down the Leen velle, yo nedn't to be afeared as——"

"And those are all?"

"All I know to, my lady."

"Quite sure?"

"As sure as—— There's Ethan's follering—that's his heathen name—on Blid'orth common. Oad Hotchkiss telled me. But they're i' tents; just two men and two women. Th' oad witch is mammy to him and the young un's his moll; or to put it more politer like, bein' ladies, his wife. A wastrell two 'r three like them, if your ladyships is passin' that way, your men could blow 'em into next week an' not leave a gob on the ground."

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"Th' oad un? Oh, a jolly round-bellied trolly, a rare un at fortune-tellin'. There een't a lass i' th' country but what she's gien her a township o' sweethearts. An' she sells the farmers a rat's bane as is——"

"And the younger one?"

"The huzzy!" quoth Mistress Ann underbreath.

"She's a handsome besom, but as fierce as a badger and as proud as a peacock; one o' them disobligin' sort as wain't tek a young man's joke as 'tis spoke."

"And the man you mentioned?"

"Ethan? A main good fiddler if noat else. He can fiddle it more sperriteder when he's sober nor what the Kirkby barber can when he's ripe drunk. He's better looked on now by the quallity too, through him helpin' on 'em to chase poor Abel's murderer. They say he'd a taen Roly by hisself alone if he hedn't been seized wi' a fallin' fit just when he were——"

"And she's married to him?" said Mistress Ann with an interrupting fierceness.

"Ower the besom, my lady. But after all could it bring 'em any nearer if they was to goo' afore the bishop?"

The ladies declined at so late an hour to resolve him so abstruse a question. Mistress Alliott again thanked him, bade him not spare the house's best and dismissed him. As soon as he was out of the room Mistress Ann exclaimed:

"As I thought! Just the proper experienced sort of minx to entrap a boy."

"I think, sister Ann, if you accept all that long-legged long-tongued fellow said for pure truth you will be doing a mighty injustice."

"To whom, prithee, sister Alliott?"

"To himself. There was a vastly fine variety in his discourse; 'twould be wronging him to take it all as one sort. Now if you are ready to retire I will knock for Endage and the candles."

At nine o'clock next morning the ladies, having lightened their equipage by leaving Endage and the two footmen behind at the inn, went lumbering off to the loud admiration of the women, children and loafers of the village. From the first inn at Kirkby, the "Blue Boy," they took as guide the stripling son of the innkeeper, and the weather being fair they reached the Nook in perfect safety half an hour before noon. When the coach stopped Mistress Ann said:

"Have you any message, sister, for your niece Fortuna?" Mistress Alliott sat as though she did not hear.

"Whether or no I must beg you make my humble compliments to Mistress Gipsy."

William opened the door; Mistress Ann stepped out, and dispensing with his further attendance went alone towards the house. With much cracking of whip the coach was presently turned and again set a-going. By which time Mistress Ann had been let in by Press. The lady's maid looked on her with astonishment. Nothing gives such a shock of surprise as the happening of what having been long expected is expected no longer.

"'Tis Madam Alliott!" she exclaimed in the low-pitched tone of exceeding wonder.

"No, Press," said Mistress Ann, "you are a few years out; I am Mistress Ann. How is your lady?"

"Mighty well, ma'am, extreme well, considering. But 't has been a long time, ma'am."

"Truly we're none of us any younger."

"I should have knowed you anywhere, ma'am."

"For my sister? Even here, Press? Well, where is she?"

Press pointed to the door on the right of the narrow passage and was going to open it.

"Nay, you may go back to your needlework or clear-starching; I will e'en take the liberty to announce myself."

The lady waited until the maid had gone out of the way, then let herself into the little parlour and shut the door again. Fortuna sat by the window with a book in her lap, possibly reading, and did not raise her head. It was not a morning evidently when she was on the look-out for anything unusual to happen. If she heard her aunt enter she supposed that it was Press.

"What is the interesting book that you are reading, niece Fortuny?" said Mistress Ann.

Fortuna looked up with a start, her book fell from her lap, she rose all trembling, in a trouble that affected even her eyesight.

"What's your name?" screamed the parrot. "I don't know you from Adam."

"I am your aunt Nan come with news of my nephew Roland. Don't be afraid"—for indeed Fortuna's pallor was fearful—"I have a good solid hope that he is on the high way to safety. How do you do, child?"

The two women met in the middle of the room. Fortuna put her arms round her aunt's neck and wept as though it were the unsluicing of all the pent-up sorrow of twenty years.

"Cry, baby, cry; put a finger in it eye," said the parrot.

To tell the truth there was a watery glister in the corner of each of Mistress Ann's eyes, though she carried it off with a jaunty—

"Tut, tut, child, what sort of weather is this?"

After Fortuna had regained her composure she questioned her aunt about Roland, and was herself questioned. Their conversation on that head was not closed, only adjourned, when they went to the window together and looked out. The mother had just been talking about her son's outdoor life and love of the forest. Such a sun as winter owns lighted up the wide stretches of green gorse, brown bracken, grey ling and beyond them an almost continuous procession of leafless woods.

"This is a more gracious country than our bleak Derbyshire," said Mistress Ann.

Fortuna's voice with constraint did her will.

"Yet I would fain see those barren hills again."

The older lady with her right hand took one of her niece's and with the other put such pressure on her shoulder as seconded an invitation to sit; then sat herself but did not let the hand go.

"Tell me how it happened," she said.

"It did not happen," answered Fortuna, "'twas the most deliberate action of my life."

She rose and went out, but soon returned carrying in her hand a morocco-bound octavo, somewhat worn but a handsome volume still. She put it in her aunt's lap.

"'Twas my mother's Protestant prayer-book," she said, "before she was married and was received into the

true church. See, there's her maiden name in her own hand."

She opened it at the fly-leaf and turned it so that her aunt could read the ill-written "Kathrin Pool her Book." Then going down on both knees she again put her hand to the book, and without any search opened it at the first page of the form of solemnization of matrimony. Mistress Ann looked from the book to her niece, as much as to say, "What mean you by this mumming?" Fortuna turned the leaf; then Mistress Ann saw that the initial M's and N's had everywhere been deleted and "Oliver" and "Fortuna" written in their stead, the man's in a man's hand, the woman's in a woman's. Fortuna turned again and again, and Mistress Ann saw that it was thus altered and filled in to the end. But after the word "amazement" a man's and a woman's signatures were set out in full, "Oliver Bond," "Fortuna Chance." It is one of the secrets of the confessional whether Fortuna was silent about this book to her confessor, or whether he gave her a dispensation to keep it under proper safeguards.

"Is such a marriage legal, think you?" said Mistress Ann at last, after pondering it.

"What else?" said Fortuna. "Mr. Bond is a legal gentleman. But pray excuse me, aunt Nan; I am shamefully neglecting my duty to you."

She rapped on the table, and immediately Press appeared to offer her services to Mistress Ann. Presently her mistress was saying:

"I have heard of the fame of the new paper-furniture but have never seen any."

"You have missed nothing," answered her aunt. "Damask hangings cost little more and are by much more lasting."

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE DRUIDS' STONE

MEANWHILE Mistress Alliott had driven over to Blidworth common, four miles distant on the other side of Newstead. It was a mere pack-horse track, but as its surface was mostly rocky and through its elevation naturally well drained, it was better for travelling on than many roads of much greater pretensions. She found the little camp not far down Long Dale, near an ancient elm called Langton Arbour. She stopped the coach and approached on foot; she had a little velvet bag in her hand. Ethan's tent stood first. Just in front of it there was a fire by which sat Ethan's mother sucking a short pipe and trimming skewers of dog-wood. Her husband, grizzled, dark-hued and gloomy-looking, crouched in the doorway, whence every now and then he reached out with a stick and lazily stirred the fire. He had a half-made fishing-rod of hazel-wood by his side, at which he may have been working. Though he stared straight at Mistress Alliott his eyes were glazed over and seemed to see nothing. On the lady's approach Zuba put her pipe into her pouch and arose.

"What can the poor woman do for the great lady?" she drawled in the true cadging whine. "Is it the dear blessed drink what'll make her twenty years younger all on a suddint?"

"No," answered Mistress Alliott, "I do not desire changes so sudden. Besides I have been twenty years younger once, and that is enough."

"Do you want the fairy foot to keep off the rheumatics? Or have you a hid complaint what the doctors

can't do noat for, what hinders you of your sleep and robs you of your appetite, and fills your body with aches as you can't put your finger on 'em and say, 'They're here'; so as all your nyst food tastes like sawdust in your mouth and all your good drink like dead watter in your throttle?"

"No, I ail nothing but what my years naturally impose on me."

"Does your ladyship want the honest true advice of the Gipsy woman, as can see surder out of her naked eyes nor the lawyer man can through his glasses, and can tell her the lucky days for buying and the lucky days for selling? I've a charm to hang round your dear pretty neck and bring good luck. It warn't made in the daytime; no, not it."

"Nay, I have enough of my own; I covet nobody's."

"Listen, and I'll speak low. Have you an enemy as hinders y' i o' your liking, and it behooves you to put her quietly and honestly and fairly and sweetly out o' the way?"

"No, I have no such enemy and no such need."

"I knowed it, lady, afore I seed you come from behind the trees. So let's drop all this 'ere empty blather and go straight to business. Make the cross with shilling pieces on your sweet palm, my lady, just for to work the charm, my lady, and I'll tell true which on 'em loves your sweet precious self an' which on 'em only loves your dear pretty little money-bags. Your left hand, my lady; 'tis nighest your blessed heart."

And so Zuba brought out all the common cant of fair and dark, of rich in wealth and rich in affection, of the sinister rival and the happy issue. She was still at it when Alfa came up from Blidworth way, carrying baskets, some plain, some fancifully wrought, which she had been hawking. She was followed at a short distance by Ethan, who looked moody and was empty-handed. Mistress Alliott saw at once that it was she with whom she had to do; but the girl turned into her tent without apparently giving any heed to the stranger.



Ethan passed on to the back of his own tent and there moodily busied himself with sharpening his knife on a stone. Mistress Alliott let the beldame go through her rigmarole, then said hesitatingly :

"What is that cure for the rheumatism that you mentioned?"

"'Tis a sure un, my lady. I daren't desave a great lady like you; and I couldn't if I tried. It'll only cost you a half-guinea, my lady, and you'll never have no rheumatics no more as long as your life. When you die, which as I see plain it'll be a long long time fust, you'll die o' summat else."

"What is it?"

"'Tis a charm, my lady; a real un, a strong un. Them what made it knowed summat. I can't tell what it's made on, becos that ud victimate it. You hang it on your neck, and then if all the rheumatics in the world stood round you in a ring they couldn't get at you."

"I'm afraid there's something unlawful about it."

"No, no, my lady. What I said, I said true; I daren't desave you. If your own holy parson seed and knowed it all he'd only bless it better."

"You said that would spoil it."

"No, my lady, not God's own true and holy parson; that couldn't spile nothing but badness."

While the Gipsy still asseverated, Mistress Alliott thought to herself :

"'Tis only half-a-guinea."

"She shall not try it unless she has it very bad."

"I shall make confession."

And so having let herself be humbugged out of half-a-guinea as well as wheedled out of half-a-crown, she took her leave in the midst of vociferous thanks. She looked into Alfa's tent as she passed, but at first her elderly sight could make nothing out in its dusky interior; and before she could speak or more than half withdraw the hand she had put into her bag, she heard a low quick clear whisper :

"Don't speak! Don't show me noat! We're a-

being watched. Drive to the Druids' Stone and wait there. Make yoursen to drop your glove afore you've went ten steps."

By then Mistress Alliott had become so far accustomed to the interior gloom, that she dimly perceived in the midst of it the glimmer of a face, suspended as it were; but before she had recovered from her surprise at the speech the lips moved and the whisper came again :

"Don't speak! Do as I tell! Or you'll be sorry. The Druids' Stone, by Blid'orth. And drop your glove."

As soon as the whisper ceased the face vanished. Mistress Alliott walked away greatly disturbed by wonder, but she did not fail to drop her glove. She rejoined her attendants, bade their guide direct them to the Druids' Stone, entered her coach and drove off.

Soon Alfa came to the door of her tent. Ethan at once put his knife in his pocket and walked towards her. When she saw him coming she went in again. He still approached, but slowly, moodily, with his eyes on the ground. He saw the glove, picked it up, ran after the coach and overtook it near the fish-pool, within a mile of Blidworth, and having received a shilling in reward walked on to the village to change it. The coach lumbered up the rough road behind him; but when he came to the cultivated land, which was fenced in for protection against the deer, he waited and held the gate open for it. Again he walked ahead; but looking back as he reached the houses he saw it stop, saw the lady descend and accompanied by the guide walk towards the Druids' Stone. Doubtless shrugging his shoulders at the fantastic Gaujo curiosity he went on.

Meanwhile Alfa, as soon as he was fairly gone north and out of sight, had again come forth, and sauntered off with a devious carelessness up the hillside towards the ancient elm, in the main an easterly direction, picking a few sticks as she went. By the time that she reached the tree, what with the roughness of the ground and the abundance of gorse, the elderly Gipsies could

see nothing of her but her head. The next time she lowered it to pick she did not raise it again, but ran swiftly and directly forward. After half a mile of that she began to go down where the valley of the tiny Syke Breck rives the high land of Blidworth in two. Up this valley she turned and sped straight for the village; but when nearing it swerved a little to the right, and running most of the way went round the back of it to the Druids' Stone. She got in first though she had twice as far to travel as Mistress Alliott, so much had active human legs the better of wheels in those days.

The Druids' Stone is a shapeless fragment of pebbly conglomerate about twice a tall man's height upstanding on a rude base of sandstone, once looked on with something of awe as the work of demon or demi-god, now to be accounted for by any geological dabbler. It would have been dwarfed by the meanest assemblage of houses, but there on that treeless hillside amid that wind-tossed sea of bracken it took the eye. Northwards the view was cut off, but in the opposite direction it showed a wide expanse of dale and hill only bounded by the wintry haze, which made a secret of the horizon. A shred of grey and a shred or two of red showed through trees half a mile away, which the instructed knew to be a glimpse of Blidworth and its church tower.

Alfa sent the guide away, then led Mistress Alliott to the leeward of the stone and under the shallow vault into which its western face was hollowed. There they were sheltered from the observation of the curious attendants and also from the brunt of the blast; which however puffed and whistled through sundry crevices that pierced the rock through to the other side.

"You must be quick, lady," said Alfa. "I shall soon be looked for."

"Why that?"

"Becos o' what I know and what I don't know. Why have you comed to me?" Mistress Alliott took Alfa's necklet from her bag. "You think he's out o' danger?"

"At least I've good hope of it."

"You're mista'en too much. He gits no furdur away from me, and he's in danger that touches his dear life very nigh."

"How do you know that, girl?"

"I dunno."

"Then you can hardly expect me to exchange my valid hope for your groundless fear."

"That's a Gaujo raison. It's things we put togedder oursens what fail, things what come o' theirsens stands. If I could on'y go to him! I'd make a pair o' wings, but I moan't."

"Why not?"

"Becos I would bring a bad wicked man on his tract, and I need to keep 'em as far apart as sunrise and sunset."

"Why?"

"I dunno."

"What an incomprehensible girl you are!"

"Am I a Gaujy girl to be looked through like a bit o' window glass?"

"Do you pretend to know where he is?"

"Pretend, lady?" There was a flash of anger from the girl's eyes, a flush of red through her skin, as though the smouldering fire beneath had suddenly been blown upon. "D'ye think I string lies togedder like his mammy, when she made up your fortune to sell for a sixpence?"

The look demanded a return look, the question claimed an answer.

"No, I don't understand you at all, but I have no doubt you are honest. Do you know where he is?"

"No, but it's nigher than it oughted to be. Oh, if I'd on'y my liberty I could soon find him!"

"How?"

"Ax me anudder question."

Mistress Alliott had a thought that made her elderly blood pulse quick.

"Step into my coach and we will go off together."

"Nay, if I go I must go faster than any coach could

carry me. But as I telled ye, this man here must be kep' here, or there'll be a very bad deal o' mischief. If I stop he'll stop, but if I go he'll not be far behind."

"You needn't let him know whither you have gone."

"Again Gaujo talk! He'd find out, aisy."

"How?"

"Who knows? For the same raison as I should find out the owner o' this."

Again Alfa's eyes gleamed and her skin blazed, as she touched with one finger the necklet which Mistress Alliott still held in her hand. Mistress Alliott would have liked to ask what that mysterious tie was between Roland and her, between her and that other man, who loomed, shadowy, out of the dusk of her ignorance and threatened. Yet she did not ask, but said instead:

"I begin to perceive that I must not pretend to understanding you. Only in one matter I claim to be able to correct you. This is not his but yours; he returns it to you with his thanks. 'Tis upon that errand I have come so far."

"He despise my gift?"

"Say rather, he does not need it."

"He done wrong; he'll need it bad afore the game's up."

"He has wealthy friends, girl. Why should he deprive you of your only riches?"

"No, no, lady, that's just why he'll need it so much, becos he has so much."

"Why more than you?"

"Becos I hain't but so little; noat you might say."

"How strange you speak!"

"Nay, lady, but it's what I don't speak makes it sound strange."

"But I mustn't allow you——"

"Stop, lady! I ax your pardon, but the time's a-running out, and he'll want to know summat what I very like shan't never get near enough to tell him."

Mistress Alliott was a little offended by the Gipsy's unceremonious interruption.

"For that matter, girl, you yourself bade him never to see you again."

"He telled you dat?" There was fiery anger where there had been something of a fierce melancholy. 'Ay, and dat is why. And he'll do very good indeed to remember. He gived me a gift to take to a girl at Sutton. I want him to know as I took it honest. I want him to know, becos I comed very near to not taking it. She was to guess who sended it. You'll see him if I don't. Tell him she guessed."

"How do you know she did?"

"She telled me no name but she telled me she knowed. And I would a seed howsumever in her face if she'd never spoke a blessed word. Quick! Make yoursen be going to Blid'orth."

Forthwith Alfa herself ran cowering along the moor and in a second or two was lost behind a bunch of broom. Mistress Iliott, alarmed she knew not why, put the necklet back in her bag before she came from under the stone. Then dissatisfied both with what she had done and not done, she walked down to the coach. As she did so she saw Ethan descend before her from Blidworth and in passing speak to her men. She was curious enough to ask what he had said.

"First, ma'am," answered William Drew, "he axed two or thray o' them questions what yo can buy answers to at a penny a hunderd and four farthings out. Then he axed me what my ladyship was a-doin' up yonner by t' big stun. I telled him straight my ladyship's doin's was no manner o' consarn to a black-snouted devil like him."

"The matter of your answer, William, was perfectly correct, but I cannot commend your wording of it."

William chose to be obtuse.

"Snout, ma'am, yo mean. Then I'll say, all I could see on him; but dunna ax me to meddle wi' unner his clo'es."

Mistress Allriott remembering Alfa's injunction drove to Blidworth, where she dined at a decent inn. Ethan,

displeased like the lady with the manner of William's reply or having his private discontent with its gist, turned back and went up to the stone as if to interrogate it, but apparently without getting his doubt resolved into satisfaction.

Two hours later Mistress Ann was told that the coach was awaiting her pleasure. Fortuna would have kept her the night, but at the first refusal said no more. Perhaps she knew who was in the coach in waiting. Mistress Ann, promising to return at the first opportunity, took her leave. Press going into the parlour a quarter of an hour later thought her mistress looked years older, and she spoke wrathfully :

"Ma'am, whatever have they been doing to you? You look tired to death."

"I am very tired," answered Fortuna.

And yet she felt as though she had less to carry. Press had the prudence to relieve herself by going out and soliloquizing towards the kitchen pots and pans and maid.

"I'm vexed to the blood," she snarled, "as ever I let that old witch over the threshold. She has hagged madam up in an hour or two; her as I've kep her complexion as beautiful as paint all this long while. If this holds I shall have to let down all her caps two years at least."

As a matter of fact Fortuna's looks had been sadly falling off for some little while, but Press had been blind to it, until perhaps her eyesight had been quickened by jealousy.

Meanwhile the coach drove on, and neither of the sisters spoke a word until they began the rough downhill towards Kirkby. Then at a sudden violent jolt Mistress Ann gave a cry of pain.

"What is't, child?" said Mistress Alliott.

"My back!"

"Poor child!"

"'Tis gone. 'Twas but a twitch. No, 'tis come again. Oh, my back!"

"'Tis along of that vile bed at yond village."

"No, 'tis along of that vile cave at Windy Knoll. But I han't told you, and can't now. I'm in pain."

"Lean upon me, Nan."

"Get me home, Felicia; quick!"

"I forgive Fortuna, with all my heart."

"I would I were at home now."

"You must try Dr. Hill's essence of water-dock this bout; to pleasure me, Nan."

"Ah, it grows upon me!"

"You will never reach Asher like this. We must return and beg Fortuna to take us in."

"She has no accommodation. 'Twould be disgracing her. There's only a chance-doctor at Kirkby, she says. Ah! I must put up with the Sutton inn and its unsavoury landlord."

"You shall not, child. And the journey home—oh, 'twould kill you!"

Mistress Alliott put her head out, stayed the coach and bade the guide on the box direct the coachman to Annesley Hall.

"I shall venture to entreat Mistress Chaworth's hospitality."

"She sees nobody," said Mistress Ann; "she lives in a solitude. 'Twould be asking hospitality of a tomb."

And she shuddered.

"Then we must return to Fortuna. And I think, Ann, your content will be greater there though the conveniency be less."

The renewed motion of the coach renewed Mistress Ann's pains.

"The aromatic vinegar, Felicia! I feel like to swoon away."

"Let me put this round your neck, child. Though I meant first to venture it on myself."

Mistress Alliott without help or hindrance from her sister tied the little black bag containing the fairy foot round her neck, muttering:

"My sin, Blessed Mother, if sin there be."



Then she watched anxiously for a change to better or worse. When Mistress Ann seemed a little easier for the fairy foot or the smelling-bottle, she said :

"The Gipsy woman shall have another half-guinea."

"What's that you're saying?" said Mistress Ann.

"You han't told me what you think of the Gipsy."

"Beautiful beyond words."

"Tut ! Those sort of killing fair are not so violent scarce."

"On the other hand she says 'dis' and 'dat' like a negro page-boy."

"Not with the same lips, I suppose. But why not say like a German king and his German duchesses ? La, sister, she's in the best of mixed company. Did you see anything of the man ?"

"There was a young man about who seemed to be very ill with her."

"That has a true married look."

"I think not, sister. But you need not be afraid of her. She believes that our boy is enamoured of a dairy-wench at Sutton whom he sent a token to by her."

"I feel a good deal better. We'll turn back and go home. And as we go by Sutton I'll challenge that dairy-wench."

But before Mistress Alliot had been persuaded to turn the coach Mistress Ann exclaimed :

"No, no, I am beat for this bout. But I'll sour her cream for her yet, the bold huzzy !"

"I shall carry you to the Bath, child, as soon as you are well enough for the journey."

"I think our Buxton waters every whit as good."

"But the air is so terrible bleak, Nan, at this time of the year."

"Well, we'll toss up, cross or pile, like our cousins of the younger branch. Nay, what a beast I am to disoblige you so. Oh !"

Mistress Ann was seized with another paroxysm of pain. Mistress Alliot had to bid the coachman drive more carefully, had to support her sister and hold the

smelling-bottle to her nose. Even in the midst of it, when like to faint, Ann said:

"Fie on thee, Felicia! 'Twould be Bob Radage's dairy-wench and token."

"Undoubtedly."

Remembering the famous protagonistic duel Mistress Ann laughed in her pain until the pain was too much for the laugh.

"Take my hand; 'tis cruel bad. But did you not undeceive her?"

"No."

"Oh, you stony-hearted dowager! I'll drive straight and—— No, I forget myself. The pain! again! Nay, sister, you are all goodness. Stop the coach; I can't bear it."

"The coach was stopped; the lady suffered with but little relief.

"Do you wish her to know, child?" asked Mistress Alliott.

"I think I should feel better even of this pain."

"Then she shall know, and soon."

The pain again abating they drove up to the Nook. Fortuna showed on her face none of the surprise that was in her heart when Mistress Alliott was announced.

"Niece Bond," said her aunt with a curtsy, "I am reduced to the last degree of unmannerliness. I am so free as to incommode you with an invalid before I have made myself right with you by a proper payment of respect. Which I acknowledge to be not acting in form."

"Prithee, madam," said Fortuna, curtsying back, "oblige me by not talking of form if I can anyhow serve you. What may I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Then they kissed like affectionate aunt and dutiful niece.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### LOOSE ENDS

PRESS bore the upsetting of her household with grim composure. She put the two sisters in Fortuna's chamber and Fortuna in Roland's. She refused to admit Endage, who remained at Sutton. She did all the work herself, she seemed untirable, body, tongue and temper, while Bridget did little more than gape and waddle. The coach was housed at Kirkby, whence Drew rode over every day to do the errands. The rest of the men were sent home on horseback. Mistress Alliott did not again visit the Gipsies. On the morrow her sister was too ill and could not spare her presence; next day she was better and not so urgent to have her go. There was a third day's delay in hiring additional horses, and by then the Gipsies had gone from Blidworth, whither could not be learnt. Whereat the ladies expressed and probably felt only a moderate degree of dissatisfaction, though Mistress Alliott considered that she was still half-a-guinea in Zuba's debt.

On the Thursday morning of the next week Press found gorse on the doorstep, a large twig. She sat up the next night in the kitchen. A little after midnight Alfa tapped on the door and was immediately and quietly let in. There was tragedy on her face, but on the table there was a cloth laid with a very good cold supper—good enough for Mr. Roland. The improper comparison had suggested itself to Press, but she had wrathfully thrust it aside. She invited Alfa to sit and eat.

"Nay," said the Gipsy, "I have rid thirty mile here, and must ride thirty back afore the cock at the farm begins calling for the day."

"You've the more need to eat. Sit you down."

"Nay, I've nayther need nor appetite."

"Sit you down. D'ye think I'm made so as to bend any way I'm pulled? I'll neither ask nor listen until you've eat."

To humour her and save time Alfa sat, ate a morsel, then put the plate from her. It would seem that the point of honour was all Press was concerned with. She insisted no more but said:

"And now what is it?"

"He's took."

"Took? Lord help us! Where?"

"I dunno; a long way off."

"Then how d'you know?"

"A bad un what I'm suspeckful on comed to my place day afore yesterday, drunk, and talked very big of it. Oh, it's true! Oh, it's too true! I feel it."

"A man"

"A bad man."

"How does *he* know?"

"He has selled his blood to the devil."

"There's more talk o' that sort o' thing than proof."

"His own mammy says so. He says so hissen sometimes when he's drunk. He says he seed him in a little prisor-room sitting on a stone by hissen. Oh, it's true, and too true."

"Then the Lord help her!"

At that moment Mistress Alliott entered the kitchen in slippers and dressing-gown for some night-need of Mistress Ann's, and was mightily surprised to find how it was occupied. A few hushed words told her all that could be told.

"True or false——" she said.

"I wish it wouldn't be true," said Alfa.

"Neither my sister nor my niece must know of this."

"Madam," said Press, "if you'll keep it from Mistress Ann, I'll take precious good care of my lady not knowing."

"I must go," said Alfa. "When I know more I'll

come again. If you know a prayer, ayther on ye, good again the devil, say it every blessed night. We shall need all the good what good words can do us. Now I'm a-going. 'Tis a heavy load Chuvion has to carry."

"Stop a minute," said Mistress Alliott; "before you go I've two restitutions to make."

She went up-stairs and returned with the necklet. At the sight of which Alfa's eyes darkened from grief to wrath.

"I hoped I'd seed the last o' that trumpery," she said.

"Wait," said Mistress Alliott; "this comes second. You gave me a message; I want to have it quite correct before I pass it on. You took a little gift, you said, from somebody here to somebody at Sutton. Was the latter somebody a Miss Bell Brandrith?"

"I've took it once. Why would you want me to take it again?"

"Because if it is, then that other somebody must be Mr. Bob Radage."

"Everybody knows," said Press, "as Bob Radage of the Woodhouse is courting Bell Brandrith of Sutton Manor."

"*He* gived it to me."

"As Mr. Bob's go-between."

There was a great lightening of Alfa's face. The stormy gloom which had troubled its sorrow passed, and left the sorrow pure.

"If I could be glad of oat," she said, "I would be glad o' that; but I can't be."

"But there's something else," said Mistress Alliott, and held out the necklet. "He has sent it back, and I think you ought to take it back." Alfa's hand showed no willingness to receive. "Why won't you?"

"These walls are a-smuddering me; I think they lay heavier on you, lady, than you knows on. If you'll come out I'll talk; I can't breathe here."

It seemed a strange shuddery proposal to that elderly lady in her dressing-gown. It was one o'clock of the night and the wind howled across the moor. She did

not say no, but neither her face nor her feet made any sign of yielding. Press went softly out, fetched an ample furry cloak and hood of Fortuna's and whispered:

"It's my long ears as she's afraid of, ma'am. Let me put this on over your nightgown. 'Twon't do you no harm to be just outside the door for a minute, to humour her. I'll stand so as to be out of hearing of your talk but in hearing of your call. There's nothing to be frightened on."

Mistress Alliott went out, reluctant, half afraid. But Alfa was not content to stop by the door; she led her through the gate, and that was to the edge of the moor. Overhung by a sky of dusky grey streaked with black, it lay before their eyes, the sombre habitation of obscurity, a dark trackless pathway for the wind, apparently as limitless as the night itself. It was Alfa who spoke first, and to ask not to answer. Her pony had trotted up to her, and stood as if listening.

"Why did he send it back, lady?"

"I told you why."

"I'm in a hurry to ha' went, but I'll stop to hear it again."

"Because your need is so much greater than his."

"Was that all? 'Twarn't just becoss a poor Gipsy gived it, and him an English gentleman?"

"No."

"That was quite all what he said?"

Alfa waited awhile for the answer which Mistress Alliott hesitated to give.

"Maybe, lady, you think as you've answered me? 'Deed, there's a many questions what can be answered by a silence like this, wi' noat in't but the rustle o' the wynd among the dry brackens, but this ain't one o' them anyhow-answered questions."

Mistress Alliott was surprised at herself. It was as if she heard the spirit of the place calling her out of her conventions. The sweeping wind seemed to speak to her, the dark earth to counsel her, the overhanging sky

to warn her. She felt herself to be both less and more than ever she had done before, proportionally less, absolutely more. But still she resisted those natural importunities, said no to Alfa and herself.

"As you have refused one of my questions, girl, you must not be surprised if I do the like by you."

"There's a difference, lady. Yourn was on'y the last end of a bit o' twattle, mine's such as ain't hardly axed twice in a lifetime."

Mistress Alliott almost submitted to the conjuration of those dark eyes, which she felt though she could not see.

"There's on'y anudder minute I can spare you for it out of all the minutes from now to never."

Again Alfa waited; half that minute, three-quarters of it. It was that that conquered, that waiting, so patient yet so vehement. Mistress Alliott felt in anticipation a pain, as it were a birth-pain. She understood at last that she could not keep the secret. Merely to refrain from uttering it would have been to let it out, a course less honourable by far.

"He returns it, Alfa, only because you did not give it as a token."

"A token, lady? What does dat mean?"

Whatever the rebellion of her pruderies how could she but answer as she did?

"It means a lover's gift."

"Then 'tis his still," said Alfa.

Just that; but the difference in the tone expressed a world of difference in the feeling. With a word she bade Chuvion wait for her outside the gate, while she led Mistress Alliott back to the house. As they went she said:

"Lady, I shall find out who did it. He shan't die for anudder man's work."

"I don't wish to discourage you, but you did not say so before."

"No, I've been that weighted as I couldn't see, couldn't feel, couldn't hardly think. Now the weight's off."

Press came to the door holding the kitchen candle. Mistress Alliott could see even by its dim outdoor shine the crimson light that blazed from the girl's face, as if with the combustion of her fears. Next moment Alfa was out of sight, and Mistress Alliott went in, greatly disturbed, with the necklet still in her hand, yet glad at heart not to have been the ruin of so splendid an exhibition of joy. Press must have seen something of it too, for she said as she shut the door :

"You'll very like think me an impertinent, ma'am."

"Very like, Press."

"And a fool."

"That's less likely."

"I come very near just now to kissing that Gipsy."

"You might have gone nearer than very near without being either."

"Well, ma'am, I couldn't feel that sure how the family ud like it."

In two weeks Mistress Ann had sufficiently recovered to travel to Ashover. Mistress Alliott no longer talked of Bath since the news of Roland's arrest. The aunts would have taken Fortuna with them but she would not leave her solitude. The day before their departure they two made a ceremonious call, as was their duty, at Annesley, Fortuna having again refused to accompany them. As they drove down thither they perceived that the gain-producing part of the estate was in good order, but nothing was done merely to delight the eye or gladden the mind. The pleasure-gardens were neglected. There was an air of desolation about the ancient house itself; no sight or sound of man. Untrimmed ivy overran its irregular many-gabled front, hung in rags from its walls and darkened its mullioned windows. The visitors were shown into a dull ill-warmed drawing-room, where they received a just civil message from Mistress Chaworth begging on the ground of her indisposition to be excused from seeing them. Her son came in to them and made what lame excuse for her he would or could. He was more natural when he expressed



indignation that the sword given by them for an honourable purpose should have been used to commit so foul a murder.

"If it gets out that 'tis ours," he said, "as I doubt it will, 'twill be a stain on our name as long as there are Chaworths."

"He is a cousin of yours," said Mistress Alliott.

"So much the worse, madam, by a good deal, begging your pardon. He could not be so distant from us as our liking is. There's just one advantage, such as 'tis, from this infernal cousinship: when strangers call him a villain I may take the liberty to call him a dirty villain."

"Nephew," said Mistress Ann, "he's as innocent of that crime as yourself. Ay, more innocent, for he does not charge it upon anybody."

"Madam, the sword was found in the very place. Our sword, by God!"

"A sword is no great matter compared with a young life. If 'twere your body now that were in danger I should feel more pity for you than for that bit of steel."

"Madam, isn't the dishonour more than my flesh?"

"Hush, Ann," said Mistress Alliott with a warning hand up; "spare us that retort. Be satisfied with the consciousness of it. Nephew Billy, I'm not going to try and dissuade you of your opinion; I only want to make a bargain with you on your own terms. This poor boy of ours whom you accuse of this villainy——"

"Madam, I don't pretend to like that word, but 'tis the one that everybody uses. You should hear how they talk. By God, they do talk! And our sword!"

"They will talk, I know. That at least they will do. But if it were to come out that he had escaped scot-free, but returned and by an act of heroism voluntarily put his hands into the shackles for another man's sake, a stranger's, a poor labourer's? What would be your opinion then of all that talk? Would not you begin to

suspect that your sword was drawn to defend life, not to take it ? ”

“Madam, I don’t see it afore me.”

“If? Come, Billy, if?”

“If, ma’am, if? Why then, Aunt Alliott, in that case I’d take off my hat to him afore all the world and say, ‘Cousin, I’ve done you a damned wrong.’ But——”

“Nephew, let the ‘but’ stand by for the present.”

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### IN FORMA PAUPERIS

It was the day on which the judges of assize entered Nottingham. After the long ride from Leicester, attended all the way by the sheriffs and gentlemen of the respective counties, Mr. Justice Bond was glad to sup alone at the judges' lodgings at Weekday Cross. While his brother judge, Mr. Baron Prawle, had accepted Mr. Rothwell Willoughby's hospitality, he himself had declined Mr. Alderman Trigge's. He had not been tempted by the rival attractions of assembly or theatre, nor even by the great main of cocks at the "White Lion" between the gentlemen of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. He sat alone, in a long room furnished with official shabbiness, sparsely yet heavily, and its musty chilly atmosphere seemed to have been stagnating and desponding there ever since its last occupation eight months ago. The coal fire fitfully lit up the dull fire-irons and a breadth of uncarpeted floor. Two wax candles set in their pewter candlesticks at the head of the long oaken table sufficiently illuminated the judge's plate, his grave face and white hands. They shone through his bottle of port wine with some show of blood-red animation, but the twin shadow of him which they cast behind his chair was lost in the many shadows which made but one shadow. Of the farther end of the room facing him nothing was to be seen but the stiff ghosts of one or two chairs and the glimmer on the wall of the glazing of some invisible picture. Still the judge ate his woodcocks and veal sweetbread and sipped his

port, all the gift of the high sheriff, with the leisurely satisfaction of a man whose moods were not subject to externals. At the bottom of the table, where he could either see it or not see, lay a crimson bag plumped out with what it held. It had been left there by his clerk when he went off to complete the evening at the Crown Inn with some new-made friends.

Beach entered, the caretaker of the lodgings, who also acted as the judges' butler, footman, messenger, and if need were, valet. A gaunt man with a white face narrowly oblong, he was garbed in a plain black suit as ancient and lustreless as the furniture, and wore his thin grey hair imprisoned in a leathern cue. He announced that a lady had called who begged the favour of a private interview with his lordship. As if in protest the judge took up again the knife and fork which he had just laid down. Said Beach as if in answer :

"I told the lady your lordship was a-supping. She said she would humbly wait your lordship's pleasure; only she wished her request to be laid afore your lordship."

He filled up the judge's glass and pottered at the dull fire.

"What name did she give?" asked the judge by and by.

"She excused herself, my lord. She said her present name your lordship wouldn't know at all, and her old un—'twas so long ago your lordship would have forgot."

Beach changed the judge's plate and served cheese and celery. The judge felt the lassitude both of fatigue and growing repletion; his further questioning, like his dealing with the cheese and celery, was a mere toying.

"What is she like?"

"A lady, my lord."

The crisp cry of the celery between his lordship's teeth sufficiently filled the gap between that answer and this question :

"Old or young?"

"Betwixt and between, my lord."

"Like you and me, Beach?"

"No, my lord, your lordship is as much nearer to the between as she is to the betwixt."

"Your compliment, Beach, is dubious. But what of yourself?"

"'Tisn't proper for the likes o' me to occupy the same comparison as your lordship."

"Your modesty, Beach, is as dubious as your compliment."

As the judge's plying of knife and fork became more and more play, so his inner review of half-forgotten faces, once young, now "betwixt and between," became more and more of an occupation, a somewhat sombre occupation for any man nearing fifty. His face gradually took on a pondering brooding ill-satisfied expression, which made Beach think an apology for the cheese necessary.

"I walked the town ower, my lord, but couldn't find a nounce weight o' ripe Stilton."

"She did not mention her business?"

"No, my lord; I will inquire on't, my lord."

Beach evidently had his proper share of decorous curiosity. His lordship did not gainsay; he was possessed by a brooding inactivity. The caretaker went out. When presently he returned the judge had left the table and was seated by the fire.

"The lady says, my lord, her business has to do wi' the past and also wi' the present."

The judge felt a touch of obscure amusement at the serving-man's baulked inquisitiveness.

"A very proper limitation, Master Beach, the future being God's alone. Even my jurisdiction extends no further than to the edge of now."

Beach having removed the cheese and left the wine, the judge motioned to him to remove that also.

"I shall want the table-room," he said.

"Please your lordship, his lordship Mr. Justice Blyth last assizes didn't want for room ayther for his bottles or his papers. At the day's end—I should say night's

end—sooner than crowd ayther of 'em he put himself unner the table."

"And the next day?"

"He was as clear and as clean as the Leen, my lord. I myself went up-street and heerd him charge the jury in the Pritchett manslaughter case. There warn't a word or a thought out o' place, my lord. I've heerd the bishop preach on 'A little wine for thy stomach's sake,' but he warn't to be compared with his lordship laying it down that the plea of intoxication was not an excuse but an aggravation."

"And where was his lordship as he did so?"

"Where, my lord? Where? Where but on the bench, my lord?"

"He ought to have been in the dock."

Beach's consternation was manifest; he seemed by some reflective process of condemnation to have judged himself guilty of that which he had heard.

"My lord! my lord! I beg your lordship's pardon! What have I said?"

"Nothing, doubtless, but what you can justify."

"Certainly, my lord, certainly! Of course his lordship was only chiding the drunkenness of common folk; I couldn't anyhow unnerstand it otherwise. Gentlemen of his quality, who take their pleasure like gentlemen and are carried to bed by their own livery sarvants, aren't to be judged by me or anybody like me."

"Quite so, Beach; they shall be judged by themselves. And now for the lady."

Having glanced towards her his thoughts immediately went back, and when his visitor entered the room were busy picturing a judge standing in a dock beside a more excusable culprit and passing sentence upon himself for the other's crime. He rose but was still occupied mainly with the self-tickling of a sombre applause for the cleverness of that far-fetched conceit, as the lady advanced slowly out of the dark by the door to the half-dark by the table; a veiled figure muffled close in hood and cloak. The judge's thoughts under compulsion returned to the

actual; with the cool courtesy of a stranger he invited her to be seated, inquired her pleasure.

"I did right, my lord," answered she, "in not sending in my old name; you *have* forgotten."

"Yet my memory is generally, I believe, fairly trustworthy. With your permission I submit it to the test."

But even then the vibrations of a forgotten voice were passing tremors through his forgetfulness, slight tremors that were not yet remembrances. She removed the veil; she threw her hood back. He half knew her; he quite knew her.

"I was once Fortuna Chance," she said, "at your lordship's pleasure;" with the stress of a mournful mockery on that word "pleasure."

Yes, it was she! And not so much altered as might have been expected, in spite of the sad responsibilities that had settled on her face. For half a second, that or more, he had a difficulty in putting between himself and her the proper separation of twenty years. The last time they had met, had met and parted, they had been so near, had shared so complete a oneness of rapture and despair. Half a second or more. But successfully ambitious gentlemen past mid life are used to being crossed by the unsubstantial ghosts of their boyish aspiration, ardours, follies; they have learnt to lay them without knock of the knee and trembling formulas of conjuration; or if with any with but a mental shrug of the shoulders as much contemptuous as compunctious. He felt instinctively that something was going to be demanded of him which he would have to refuse. His next utterance therefore was of the nature of the defensive.

"I believe I have to congratulate you upon a change of name."

She was too thoroughly disillusioned to fancy there was anything in that either of reproach or regret; she clearly understood how expeditiously he had jerked all responsibility on to the shoulders of a shadowy husband.

"Yes, I go now under the name of Fortuna Surety. I retain my fortunate Christian name."

He was thick-skinned to the prick of whatever under-meaning might be therein.

"I met a Mr. Surety once when riding the circuit. I believe a Somersetshire gentleman."

"My lord, I have come to speak to you about—my son."

The hesitation over the last two words was just so long as was necessary to translate the "our" that was in her mind into the "my" of pride and propriety. She did not indeed once think of saying "our," but it was in her thoughts all the time; as she took it for granted that it must be in his.

"What may the young gentleman's name be, madam?"

"Roland."

"Ah."

He felt a certain illogical jealousy of the son's intrusion. The supposed husband he had willingly accepted as a convenience, but that young cub—he was sure that he should heartily dislike him, had already begun to do so. Nevertheless he resolved to do what he could for him, rather for his own ease' sake than for conscience or the mother. He supposed that she came to beg the reversion of some clerkship or other office which lay within his gift or influence.

"What can I do for young Mr. Roland?"

"Save his life, my lord!"

Hitherto she had kept a perfect self-restraint, now she let it all go together. She fell on her knees before him, bringing her face contorted with the agony of petition out of the half-shade into the full candle-light. He was startled both at the likeness and the difference. He remembered, nay, saw rather like a present thing, how once he had knelt to her; not, alas! in vain.

"Madam, arise!"

As he attempted to raise her, she clasped his in her own uplifted hands.



"Let me remain, my lord!"

"It is not for my honour, madam, that while I stand you kneel."

"I feel more certain of you, my lord, kneeling, somewhat securer about my son."

"Nay, rise, madam, and what little interest I have, so far as without prejudice to my oath and conscience I may pledge it, is yours and his."

She suffered herself to be raised and reseated. Nevertheless she experienced a certain loss of confidence, as she had anticipated that she would. And rightly, for her face being again in semi-obscurity, that poignant contrast of similarities and differences was blurred back into the common variance between a girl of twenty and a woman of forty; also her red-rimmed eyeballs lost their outstarting, appealing look. Still the judge, though he had rid himself of the clasp of her hands and was seated three yards off, spoke with a kindly interest.

"You mentioned your son, madam, as being in some danger. I hope——"

His glance went towards the crimson bag which he had placed upon the table.

"Yes, you are to try him, my lord."

"Upon what charge?"

"He is innocent, my lord!"

"I have not yet read the depositions. I was just setting about doing so."

"Be assured he is innocent, my lord; most assuredly! Otherwise I would not have troubled your lordship. I am used to suffering in silence. Or if there be guilt in any respect it is mine. I threw him away on a dead cause. I am liable to such an impulse of waste, it would seem."

"He must be very young. What is his age?"

She was on the point of crying out, "Who should know if you do not?" but using some self-violence restrained her answer within the narrow limits of the matter of fact.

"Nineteen, my lord."

She thought she had said everything, had stripped

herself and him. But he had not so good a reason, or thought he had not, for remembering the date of their separation. Still his hasty back-reckoning did at least get the year right, helped by the too lawyerish recollection that Lord Macclesfield's disgrace befell about the same time. And nineteen from twenty-one leaves—— Instead of being stirred, disquieted, smitten, self-accused and convicted, he let in the arithmetico-cynical thought: "Why, she hardly gave herself a widow's proper period before admitting consolation." The mother's feelings escaped from the confinement into which she had constrained them.

"Only nineteen, my lord! And so fine, so handsome a boy! So like——"

The judge filled up in his own way that yawning rift.

"Yourself, madam, I hope."

"His father, my lord."

She was sensitive to the frigidity of his compliment, had meant to stop there, had stopped; but suddenly the closure was taken off from her mouth and words burst forth anew.

"No, my lord, his eyes are blue, and mine, you——" she stayed herself on the brink of saying "you remember"—"you see, are hazel or brown"—observe that even at such a time she rejected that possible dash of green—"hazel or brown, I don't know which——"

The "and you don't care," abruptly omitted, gave a sound of manifest incompleteness to the sentence; which was why the judge again looked towards her and not for the sake of her eyes.

"The more reason," he said, "that Mr.—" he had forgotten the name—"that the father should bestir himself on the young man's behalf."

She understood that he had expressed a preference for her absence. What she uttered was the mere ice of emotion.

"He bids fair, my lord, to be of the other side."

"Is it possible that he is hostile?"

"Worse, my lord, indifferent, stone-cold."

Which, so sadly uttered, coloured him in swift succession with two moods; first to purse up still more the strings of his emotions, as if saying: "Her husband does not interest himself; why should I?" and secondly to relax them into a more generous pity. But Fortuna had risen, and by rising seemed to have thrown off part of the restraint that had been on her bearing, on her voice, on her eyes, on her feelings.

"Oh, my lord!" she said with outstretched hands, "if I could only convey to you what I feel without the imperfection of words! If I could in an instant make yours what is mine! I was content, my lord, with him, with only him; without him I am horribly alone, have not even myself. Oh the cold lying, the cruelty of circumstance! They found a hat—if only that hat could speak!—a hat and a sword. Think how horrible a thing it would be, my lord, if you—you were to—— It's death, my lord! death to him and me!"

"I would fain hope otherwise. But in any case I, madam, am therein but the poor instrument of justice and the king."

"Oh, we are all poor instruments; and none so much as I, I who have so much to say, so much need to say it, and stand with brain palsied and tongue oppressed even by that overmuch of matter and urgency. Only nineteen, my lord, and to have attributed to him the butchery of a hardened criminal!"

"Madam, what would you have me do?"

"Know more, my lord, than goes in by the ear. Oh, my lord, 'tis a narrow entrance to the soul, and if you have no other you will do a terrible injustice upon him and me and yourself."

"A just judge, madam, admits of no access but by his hearing; that is the one strait inlet to the shrine of his judgment; every other savours of intrigue, back-influence and bribery."

"My lord, he came to me; 'twas a terrible night; there was no colour on his face; he seemed to exhale terror. I cried out. I saw death after him."

It was untimely trifling, but it occurred to him that "exhale" was a favourite word of his own, extraordinary bailee of much that might as well have gone by common carrier.

"Are you to be called as a witness, madam?"

"No, my lord, I suppose not. 'Tis all in such a horrible tangle; the truth has so many shadows of falsehood cast upon it that itself looks like a black lie. Our own counsel fears to call me, and the other side is secure without me. My lord, he stole down before break of day; I heard him; his footstep was light but I had not slept, and——"

"Madam, be advised by your counsel. Bethink yourself that if anything material to the case came to my ears, I might be impelled by my duty, compelled by my oath to have it brought into court."

"My lord, you have prejudged us!"

"Not so, madam; my mind is clear of any bias whatever."

"That is the hardest thing you have said yet."

"No, the kindest, everything considered. I would fain impress upon you your learned counsel's advice; that by your prayers and your silence you can best serve your son's interest."

"You bid me appeal to God's hearing against your deafness?"

"I must beg you to excuse me; I have much to do before morning. My time, even at this late hour, is not my own."

His eyes glanced aside to the bag on the table, and hers followed.

"Is it there, my lord?"

She eyed that crimson bag of modest appearance with affright as though within it were hidden a death—two deaths, as though it were stained with the waste of two lives.

"Pray read it, my lord, while I wait. I shall know by your face."

"Nay, madam, such a course would neither be salut-

ary for you nor convenient for me. I need to collect my thoughts, you to summon your resolution."

"My resolution is summoned, what there is of it, both summoned and summed up. I have enough to sit and face your reading without a murmur or a sigh or the quiver of a lip. I have not enough to bear the torture of another day's suspense; one iron day hammered out to the length of a hundred. And such a hammering, my lord!"

She had her hand on her heart as she spoke.

"You do not know what you ask. The perusal may take a considerable time. There will be this to be weighed and reweighed, that to be noted, this and that to be compared, the whole to be digested."

"You shall not know, my lord, whether I suffer or am numb."

"You might mistake the reading of my face."

"I have never misread it yet, my lord. You will generously grant this my last request. I will walk away when you have done and make no appeal against your verdict."

There was probably a surface prick of remorse, there was possibly a deep-seated obscure stirring of sentiment, there was undoubtedly the drawing of expediency. The judge saw a means of dismissing an inconvenient suitor without further trouble; he knew he could trust her word. He made only one objection more.

"I am but mortal man, subject in everything to error of judgment. My opinion may differ largely from that of the jury, from that of any twelve men whom you could select."

"You have the reputation, my lord, well deserved I doubt not, of an able and learned judge without fear or favour. I shall be quite sure. I shall walk away without more words."

The judge bowed to her, she curtsied to him; that was their farewell. Then he went to the table, shook the papers out of the bag, selected that endorsed with Roland Surety's name, drew the inkstand towards him,

sat down, selected a pen, just trying it on his thumb-nail, and then began to read. There was no robe or tippet, no bustle of javelin-men, no mouthing of oaths, no pompousness of oratory, no ranks of eager onlookers, to distract the mind ever so little from its strained attention. There was no sound but the dry crackle of the leaves as the judge turned them over, or now and then the harsh twitter of his pen when he made a note. There was not half the length of the table between them. He sat with his feet under it, side face to her. By the light of the candles the slightest variation in his fine austere profile was visible to her steadfast gaze, the least wrinkling of his judicial forehead, the lifting of an eyebrow, the parting, closing or indrawing of a lip. And there was nothing extraneous about him that demanded even a momentary glance; no gleam of ring either on the hand that held the paper or that wrote, no knot or curl to his close wig, no flaunting ruffle to his shirt, no extravagance of lace on his cravat. How divergent were their thoughts, that world-possessed man's, that one-ideaed woman's, as he read and sufficiently noted his with fugitive ink, as she looked and made indelible record of hers with the stylet of pain.

Still he read, and on his legible countenance settled dark and yet darker the frown of righteous condemnation. The room was quite still but for the cackle of the paper, the occasional squeak of the quill. St. Mary's chimed the three-quarters, and then after a long interval the hour, ten slow resounding strokes upon the ponderous bass. The woman's son lay nearer to it than herself, and she wondered, without for an instant relaxing the pain of her attention, whether he too heard; whether to him also it counted out ten iterations of a black verdict. She sat in the half-dusk, rigid, stirring neither hand nor foot, her eyes always at one point. The wavering glimmer reflected by prominence of nose or chin only made her expression the more grimly inscrutable.

Twice indeed she came forward and snuffed the candles; but the judge did not look her way even then.

Having settled to the reading, his disciplined concentration was never disturbed. He took an intellectual pleasure in the connotation of evidence, the heightening of the salient, the obliteration of the irrelevant, the elucidation of the obscure. The studious severity of that face turned to the candles was no more comparable to Nimrod's jocund outdoor flush, than his safe wooden support was to the hunter's precarious seat upon the living and moving. And yet he felt in his heart the joy of the sport; it gleamed guardedly out of his eyes, gave a curbed curve of triumph to his lips and warmed into ardour the rigours of his intellectuality. He rode huntsman-like, marshalling that yelping pack of evidence, whipping it into clean order, dexterously putting it on the true scent, firmly keeping it to a single purpose, victoriously conducting it from the mere nose-truth of suspicion to the view-holloa of probability, the long run with the zest of a fault cleverly repaired, and the glorious in-at-the-death who-hoop! of proof positive. The chase had been long, the pace rather sure than fast, and St. Mary's bells were merrily jangling the half-hour when he put the writing down. At the same moment Fortuna rose, drew up her hood, resumed her veil and turned to go. Her expression was a matter of guess but her footing was perfectly steady. He had forgotten her presence; he felt as if he had been caught in an act of butchery; his self-possession was shaken. He rose, saying somewhat haltingly:

"Madam, I beg pardon for my obliviousness."

She was at the door before him, but it was opened from the other side and Baron Prawle appeared, wine-flushed, unsteadily legged, hilarious.

"Hoho!" said he. "I perceive, brother, that you have been improving the opportunity. May I ask, madam, how many letters there are to your fair name?"

"You might, sir," answered Fortuna, "if there were any reason for your inquiry."

"Reason? Nay, he and I are more than brothers in the fore part of the day, sit on the same bench, suck at

the same 'anno Georgii Secundi,' eat off the same dry platter of firstlies, secondlies and thirdlies; but when court is adjourned he goes straight home like a good dull honest wiseacre, and thrusts his head into a bed-cap to keep night fancies out and day sobrieties in; whereas I put on my mad-cap, go forth and frequent those who speak many languages."

He still stood tipsily in the doorway, blocking it.

"If wisely done, sir, that should be instructive."

"Ay, madam, there you are! But they set a sialwart serving-man at the door to impound our hats, wisdoms, walking-canes, watches and other extranea before entrance, so that i' th' end I had but the wit left to bring away such scraps as '*bibe dum bibis*' and '*ἦ πῖθι ἦ ἀπῖθι*.'"

"Brother Prawle," said Judge Bond, "while you talk the lady stands."

"I be ten myriads of pardons; I shrink into material insignificance."

So saying the Baron did at least draw aside; with a quarter-curtsy the lady passed on. Bond would have followed her but was obstructed by his fellow of the bench, who not only stood in his way but held him by the lappet of his coat, saying:

"Nay, nay, my brother of the King's Bench! restrain your youthful ardour. You give your Daphne less than the fair hunting law; which is just so long as you shall take to sing with proper hibulous expression, 'Drink to me only with thine eyes.'"

Bond broke away from him without ceremony, but when he reached the outer door Fortuna had already passed through. He stepped into the roadway. It was unlighted; the only break to its gloom came from the transverse projection from the open doorway behind him of a band of feeble light, barred by his own black shadow. He could see nothing. Only he heard both up street and down, faint and yet fainter on the pavement, a distant footfall, one of which might be the echo of the other, and either of which might or might not be



Mistress Surety's. He felt an inexplicable regret at having parted from her without the ceremony of a word.

The band of light took his eye across the narrow street to the paltry town-hall, which stood opposite, meanly indistinct, town-hall and jail in one. His thoughts went down to the prisoners in hold below ground; some of whom lay barred in with the certainty of a shameful death. He heard or thought he heard the clink of a chain. He hastened to disavow his first thought, that it might be Fortuna's son; who of course, being a county prisoner, was confined at the shire-jail, a hundred yards up street. He looked skywards; there was no sky visible, nothing but a uniform inscrutable blackness. Only nineteen! Which poignant thought roused the self-defensive reflection: "Anyhow she was not long inconsolable." She who had sworn with an illegal or preterlegal solemnity, "Until death us do part"! He felt the down-street blast of the keen east wind; he shuddered, went in and shut the door on the street, the prison and his thoughts.

What resentment he might have entertained against Baron Prawle was mitigated by the relief he felt at not having to return to the sole company of that bag of depositions. There was therefore good-fellowship mixed with the acerbity of his opening sarcasm.

"You appear to have made good use of your time."

"Use, brother? You might say usury, were not that illegal and I a bulwark of legality. I have been cultivating the friendship of the best irrigated fellow I ever had the good hap to light on in this arid world."

"You too seem to have done your utmost to qualify its aridity. But what are the qualifications of that moist paragon of friendship?"

"He has a mistress with a name of twenty-seven letters, one more than the complete alphabet, and we have drunk a bumper to every letter of it."

The baron sat heavily down in the chair lately occupied by the justice; to whom the position may have suggested

something. Anyhow he put the depositions *re* the Crown *v.* Roland Surety under the baron's eye, and said :

"Your wisdom must be ripe, rotten ripe."

"You give my brains the quality of a medlar ?"

"Yes; therefore let them meddle with this. Give me your learned opinion on 't."

"Nay, I've other-guess work than to be following the banal deviations of your uninventive criminals. Do you ask me to prefer a blundered murder or botched larceny to the subtle intricacies of a right of light or the elegant damages and detriments of a breach of promise? Roland Surety. Humph! Surety! What a fortune of a name for a blind-drunk dicer!"

But having the papers before his eyes, the baron slipped into a perusal of them. He was perfectly clear-headed; as though the vat into which he had poured so much *pc* was not organ to the same body as his efficient brains. The justice unwittingly sat in Fortuna's chair; and being there did in some degree, whether through that wooden contact or some subtler prompting, feel with Fortuna. He kept his eyes willy-nilly upon the baron's rubicund visage uplifted by the candles and the wine. With some of her anxiety he scanned that snub nose and thick-lipped mouth for favourable signs; with some little of her heart-sinking watched the gradual assemblage about eyes and mouth of the condemnatory omens. Twice he arose, as though because he must, and snuffed the wasting candles. Meanwhile Prawle had concentrated on the document his attention as well as his vision; which however did not stay his learned brother from feeling the relief of sitting in the shade. Could it be that femininity was contagious, was communicable through wood?

At last the baron tossed the document aside, so carelessly that it fell to the ground.

"As I thought," he said. "What possessed you to present me with this pikestaff whereon to exercise my undoubted genius for hair-splitting? Pshaw! the case

requires no more than the common mechanical dexterity of a wood-chopper."

Bond rose, glad to shift his attitude, mental and physical.

"You look on it as a plain case?" said he.

"Plain? Where are your special-pleading wits, brother? You speak with the accent of an emotional linen-draper or of a love-lorn sempster suing *in forma pauperis*. Plain? The treason indeed is no great matter, but a loyal jury will lug it in with tother. *Nota bene*, I who care not for fish will eat it with murder sauce. Crab sauce I would say. Pugh! the man or lad, for he is no more, is hanged already, dead and buried. An expeditious coroner might save time by sitting on him the day after to-morrow concurrently with yourself. There's a Roland for your Oliver, a Surety for your Bond."

The proverbial connections, which the justice had not remarked before, of his own name with her son's gave him somewhat of a shock. He escaped, not as she had done, out into the dark street, but into the inner obscurity of his own thoughts. He sat by the shadowy hearth with his back to the candles, his face to the flickering unrevealing firelight. The baron, relieved of his mental tension, had immediately fallen forwards asleep and snored to the table.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### TILL DEATH

THE shire-hall was a ruinous barn-like building of stone patched with brick. Over the king's court was a hay-loft and under it the old dungeons, recently turned to fitter use as the jailer's brew-house and cellars. Behind it, with a yard between, a new jail had been built, not very bad as jails then were. There Roland was confined, but not with the mass of the prisoners or in a felon's underground cell, the jailer having been handsomely bribed into giving him a private room with proper bedding instead of straw to lie on. There by favour of smaller bribes to the turnkey he received two visits on commission day, while the judges were occupied with legal pomp and with feasting at the high sheriff's table, and these demand some mention. The first was Fortuna's; but we shall be glad to turn our eyes from the meeting and parting of mother and son, and only record the smaller and less poignant part of what passed between them. It would seem that there had been all along a struggle in Roland of shame, pride, and reverence, with fear for himself and pity for his mother, and that the latter did not get the upper hand until near the close of the interview. For it was only then that hesitatingly he suggested that she might apply to his father for help and counsel. It was the first time that he had ever mentioned his father to her, but giving herself a little time to get over the surprise and shame and terror she was able to say:

"Child, I have applied to him."

There needed no more; the tone and manner of it apprised him of the failure of her appeal. Last of all,

ay, even after what had the appearance of the last kiss Fortuna said :

"Is there anybody whom you would see and han't yet seen ?"

"Ay," answered he.

"Child, she wears fetters too or she would sure have visited us before this. We han't heard of her since she brought the news. I call her angel. What do you call her ?"

"Mother, I have never been well enough with her to call her out of the ordinary."

"Search shall be made. You shall see her yet."

"She will need to make haste."

Then they parted as in the consciousness that there must be the pang of a death between that and their next greeting.

Fortuna with such influence as her aunts could command set on foot an inquiry after Alfa; which seemed likely to be futile but proved only unnecessary. Alfa arrived at Nottingham that same day from a distant county, whither Ethan had retired after Roland's arrest. She returned not so much at her own impulse as following her pal's. Setting aside possible drawings too obscure for a hint, we may suppose that what brought him where he had so little need to come was a desire with the help of eyesight to exult sufficiently over the downfall of an enemy. He went forthwith to the jail and spent some hours outside it with much satisfaction, pacing the street to and fro and doubtless appraising the difference between out and in. It was evening before Alfa gained admittance to the inside. She had to dodge his short calls at the nearest public-house, and besides the lewd-minded turnkey with suggestive leer and grin stood out for double pay. She went and procured another crown by I know not what shift. Roland started up on her entrance. His chains rattled about him as he rose, but for the moment he forgot them and the walls. She wore a large shawl which covered her Gipsy garb from head to foot. She stood by the door,

the width of the room between them—it was not much—and at first seemed to be thinking more of herself than him.

“Ay,” she said, seeing his eyes fastened on her, “sure you think me a fool from head to foot.”

“No, Alfa.”

“You must if you’ve any mite o’ sense at all yoursen. Didn’t I discharge you never to see me again? And now I’ve comed to you.”

“May-be because I couldn’t come to you, Alfa.”

“My God, and that’s true!” she exclaimed, and casting off all reserve advanced and took him by the hand. “And how are they treating you here in this dog’s hole?”

“I don’t know; I don’t think I know the difference between their good and their bad.”

Straightway she recovered from her emotion.

“There’s no time to lose, not one tiny little minute. I oughted to come sooner, but there’s been allus one great ugly hindrance. Ne’er mind, I’ve half saved you once, and I’m bent on saving you quite afore I done.”

Roland shook his head.

“I wish I was over-again Annesley once more, Alfa, in your tent.”

“Speak not on’t,” she said peremptorily, “but hark to me. Is there anybody you suspek o’ this?”

“No.”

“Nobody whatsomever?”

“Nobody.”

“Dabla, what a thing ’tis to be a Gaujo! No Gipsy could have an injury wi’out having a suspicion. I’m chockful to my skin of ’em, but what’s that? I can’t prove noat by ’t’cept to mysen. There’s a man—I want to know what he were doing whilst the storm was on that hell-hound of a night. But nobody can’t tell me. He says hissen he was at the ‘Admiral Anson,’ but I know better. He was there later I know, and he comed to the place about after midnight very drunk. I’ve watched him, dadia, how I’ve watched him! day and night,

sober and drunk and betwixt, till I think I know his inside as well as his fine coat and breeches—all but one tiny little bit. He keeps that from me; and that's every-thing. So wake up, sluggard! Ha' you the irons on your mind too? Tell me from beginning to end how you comed to be mixed up wi' this. Quick! there ain't a moment to lose."

"What's the good, Alfa?"

"The good? Every good; the good o' dear precious sweet life. Quick! I'm like a swaling candle, and who knows when that grinning devil wi' the bunch o' keys will come and blow me out? Quick! there's need. I need, if you don't."

He told her shortly how he had heard that cry in the dark, had run towards it and fallen over the body.

"You saw noat?"

"Noat but the dark."

"And heard noat?"

"Noat but the wynd."

"My God, where was your ears and eyes that same night? Had you lent 'em away? Think yoursen ower; go through it again; force yoursen to see and hear. Your life and mine hangs on't. Look at me!"

He looked at her, and as if with the stimulus of that look suddenly leapt into remembrance.

"I did hear something," he said.

"What was it?"

"I heard—it wasn't a laugh. What was 't? Was it a laugh? It seems as if my ears were full of that storm now."

"A laugh and yet no laugh?"

"That's the very colour on't."

"Low?"

"Ay, no more than a devil's chirrup."

"And for a laugh none so merry?"

"Merry? Nay, 'twas a wail of a laugh."

Alfa's face, which had been clearing, suddenly broke out into light.

"Summat like this?"

She imitated Ethan's hysterical chuckle to the life.

"The very pattern on't!" cried Roland. "How do you know? Was you there? What does it mean?"

"It means that when Roland Surety's in court there shall be somebody else there too on trial; ay, if I ha' to drag him there. And when he's there I'll keep him there; ay, if I ha' to hold the door again him. He has been drinking deep o' late."

Thereupon they heard a heavy approaching footstep in the corridor. Roland took her right hand in his two shackled ones.

"'Tis the first and last time," he said.

Her lips gave what his eyes asked.

"There's one becos 'tis the first time; there's another becos 'tain't the last; one for you, one for me." There was the warning jangle of keys behind the door. "Now we're rom and romi."

"Husb' d and wife?"

"Ay, fast bound."

"Till death," said Roland, solemnly, lovingly, mournfully.

"Till death," said Alfa, solemnly, lovingly, joyfully, as the key turned in the keyhole. "Keep a good heart, my rom. Death's ugly dog's face may be furdur off than you 'hink."

When the door opened there was already the space of two yards between them, the separation, as it seemed to Roland, of a life. The rest of their farewell was more than mere words, more even than looks, for it persisted more poignantly, more lovingly, with a straiter, an unfettered embrace after she had passed through the door out of sight. The turnkey came a step or two in.

"A pretty bit o' flesh," he said, and there was the hellish flame of lust in his eyes. "Hark, mester! Yo might hae another turn if yo'd let me goo snacks."

"Go to the devil with your beastliness," said Roland.

With the slightest of changes the warder's brutality passed from lust to cruelty.

"Thankee, thankee! After yo, mester. I look to see



him hae yer dangling like a live bait at th' end of a line no later nor next Monday. Yo've not a deal o' time left. I've been civil to yo, young man; it ud pay yo to be civil to me."

"All your civilities have been paid for, thrice over. I desire none except on the same terms. Go, and see the lady out with proper respect; you had better."

The man's ferocity was dulled over with greed, like a scurf of sorry ash half-concealing a blood-red glow. Still as he let Alfa out he growled:

"Lady, quotha! Respect, quotha! I warrant there has been times and times'll come again, when your Gipsy ladyship'll hae to put up wi' the respect of what we choose to gie, be 't kick or kiss."

## CHAPTER XXXVI

OYES !

"ROLAND SURETY, hold up thy hand," quoth the clerk of the arraigns.

Roland Surety held up his hand. The clerk read out his indictment with its two capital counts of high treason and murder.

"How say'st thou, Roland Surety? Art thou guilty of the high treason and felony whereof thou standest indicted? not guilty?"

"Not guilty," answered Roland Surety.

"How wilt thou be tried?"

"By God and my country."

"God send thee a good deliverance."

It was the second day of the assizes. The judge sat on the bench in the pomp of his full-bottomed wig, ermine tippet and scarlet robe, hedged about with marshals and javelin-men, attended by the high sheriff, the magistrates and other conspicuous gentlemen of the county, among whom were Lord Byron and William Chaworth. On the wall over his head were the King's arms with the heraldic boast of *Semper Eadem*. The prisoner stood in the dock with the sole attendance of a warder, but relieved by the customary indulgence of his shackles, the insignia of his status. Behind his back thronged the usual rabble of eager sightseers, Alfa among them accompanied by Ethan. In a dark corner of the gallery, but not out of his sight, sat his mother and Mistress Alliot with sad white faces. So the court was set and the jury sworn.

"Oyes!" cried the crier. "If any of you can inform

my Lord the King's Justice, the King's Attorney or Solicitor General of any treason, murder, felony or other misdemeanour committed by the prisoner at the bar, come forth and you shall be heard; for the prisoner at the bar now stands upon his deliverance."

The prosecution took no great pains with the first count of the indictment. There was official evidence that the prisoner was a popish recusant convict, evidence of his journey to Derby. To prove his association with the rebels they called nobody but the Duke of Devonshire's groom and whipper-in and the farmer at whom Roland had made a defensive thrust on the Yorkshire bridge. Evidently they relied in confidence on the second count for hanging their man. Indeed the treason charge was so lightly dealt with that there is reason to believe that it was made not so much to gain the jury's verdict against the prisoner as to prejudice the Jacobite cause and the Catholic religion by connecting them ever so slightly with so foul a murder.

As to the second count there were witnesses to prove his long-standing quarrel with Marrott, the cause and course of it and his avowed determination to be revenged on him. To his home-coming dabbled with blood Bridget Mikin was sworn, with the corroboration of her brother who was mysteriously excluded from the cottage that night. Press was subpoenaed and either liberally forswore herself or suffered from many lapses of memory, but in the main her crafty evasions did her young master no good. There was ample evidence of the discovery of the corpse, beside it Roland's hat and near it a sword, the scabbard of which together with a bloodstained coat was found in his chamber. His return next morning to the scene of the murder, his pursuit and escape were established, likewise his various incriminatory statements.

As to that count at any rate never had there been a clearer case. Mr. Justice Bond might have let his attention go to sleep upon the certainty, but for two things. First there was the presence of the mother in the gallery,

and the occasional glimpse which he could not avoid of her set white face made it difficult for him to rest content with his intellectual assurance of the son's guilt. Else he was not at all prepossessed in Roland's favour, but looked on him as a sulky boorish criminal lump of a lad, not in the least like his mother. It was therefore all the more singular—to come to the other point—that at perhaps the hundredth iteration of the prisoner's name Baron Prawle's idle quip of "a Roland for your Oliver, a Surety for your Bond" recurred to him; and with such persistence that for the rest of the trial it was never quite out of his mind. It was or seemed to be the cause why more than once he caught himself reckoning back the precise date of his breaking with Fortuna. Being so caught by himself he forthwith desisted, and with an obscure inexplicable feeling of relief returned to his original slack computation of twenty-one years.

In answer to the speeches of the prosecution the counsel for the defence, as the law then stood, was only allowed to address the court upon the first count. They objected with grammatical reason but without practical effect to the Latinity of the indictment. They dwelt upon the irresponsibility of the prisoner's nineteen years—"Nineteen from twenty-one leaves two," said his lordship to himself—asserted the triviality of his ride to Derby and his immediate return; explained that his companionship with the Highlanders was both brief and accidental, maintained that the King's counsel had succeeded in proving not their case but their want of one; in short they did the best they could with scanty materials. They called Mistress Ann Chance at her own urgent instance, also William Drew and a few other witnesses, mainly as to character, but among them was Mr. Strawbenzie the Wakefield attorney, who stated under what circumstances Roland had returned to Wakefield. The surprise of that evidence stirred the first emotion favourable to the prisoner both in audience and judge. It made William Chaworth bethink himself shrinkingly of his rash promise to Mistress Alliot. When counsel had

done speaking and examining the judge said with less severity and more pity :

"Roland Surety"—that 'Roland for an Oliver' would not from his mind—"Roland Surety, learned counsel have spoke ably and faithfully in thy behalf upon the first count of thy indictment, that of high treason in levying war against our Lord the King. What hast thou to say for thyself concerning the murder of Abel Marrott whereof thou also standest indicted?"

Roland spoke, much against his counsel's advice, in a sullen mutter hardly audible to the bench :

"I didn't kill him. I heard a screek and ran towards it with the sword that I had about me in my hand."

"And then?" asked the judge. "What did you see?"

"Nothing; 'twas pitch-dark."

"What of the clock was it?"

"Some five of the evening."

"And so you went away?"

"No, I fell over something. I thought it was a quick man. I made shift to raise it up and bear it a little way. But when I saw the face that it was dead and bloody too, I dropped it and fled amain."

"If it was pitch-dark at five of the clock so that you could see nothing, how was it that you could see the face?"

"I know not; but so 'twas."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nothing save a laugh."

"A laugh?" said the judge incredulously.

"A sort of laugh."

"What sort of laugh?"

"I can't just say, my lord; a laugh without any body to it."

"What did you then?"

"I was afraid. I ran towards it in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. 'Twas then, I bethink me, that I fell over the body."

"Before you said a screek, now you say a laugh. Which was it?"

"Both, my lord."

"Both in one or separate?"

"As you will, my lord."

"How came you, being a popish recusant convict, by that sword?"

"I beg leave to be silent thereon, my lord."

"Is that all you have to say for yourself?"

"Ay."

He had better have said nothing. The seeming contradictoriness of his statement checked the sympathy which had begun to stir both bench and court on his behalf. It was then nearly two o'clock, the genteel dinner-time. In an ordinary way the judge would have either abridged his summing up or adjourned the case to the following day; but Justice Bond was too conscientious to do the one and too weary of having Mistress Surety's pale face above him to do the other. He adjourned for an hour. As soon as he had left the court the prisoner was taken below. Some of the gentlemen in attendance hastened away to dine, some stopped awhile to discuss the case, to exchange greetings with a legal acquaintance or to look at the sword that lay on the table. Among these last was Lord Byron but not his cousin Chaworth, who went out and waited by the door for a friend with whom he was engaged to dine. He had deferred keeping his undertaking with Mistress Alliott; I am afraid he hoped that his dinner and his friend would detain him until it was too late to keep it. In a minute or two Byron came out, and as he passed him said with a darkling sneer:

"Chaworth, the sword has your crest on't. You must either call cousins with this young murderer or call him thief and add another count to his indictment."

"Then, my lord," said Chaworth straightening himself up, "I call cousins."

"So I may congratulate you on the relationship? And on the sword also?"

"My lord," said Chaworth hotly, "I have one on, at your service."

"Hush, hush, my lord and sir!" said an aged gentleman sternly; "this is no place to talk of such things either in game or earnest."

So what had like to have been a kinsmanlike quarrel passed for the time being and was not properly settled for another nineteen years; but in a few minutes it got about that the prisoner was somehow akin to the Chaworths. We may be sure that during the dinner-hour conjecture went round many a table as fast as the wine-bottle. Indeed to keep pace with it some of the gentlemen had to eat a little less and drink a little more than usual. Anyhow most of them returned punctually to the court, and while they awaited his lordship's entrance they discussed probabilities. It was thought significant that young Chaworth did not return. Moreover an elderly Derbyshire gentleman, who was a guest of Sir William Parsons on Short Hill had during the interval declared that he knew the two ladies with the mother to be members of the Chance family. This passed round to the increase of surmise. Many a man said "I smell a rat," who had no nose for anything less rank than a fox. Fortuna came in again between her aunts, and immediately the Derbyshire gentleman—perhaps the declining sun shone more directly on the west window, perhaps the bottle of wine had emboldened his recognition—immediately he said to Sir William:

"By Gad, t'other lady, the mother, unless I mistake, is Mistress Fortuna Chance herself. She whom a young fellow named—What? Bond? Ay, Bond—got into a vile scrape—ay, a matter of twenty years ago."

"What Bond?"

"Orlando—no, Oliver Bond, I, believe. A lawyer, I almost——"

"Not his lordship?"

"Haha! 'tis not impossible. In that case our young felon below-stairs may have a friend in court more than we wotted of."

"Silence in the court!"

The judge entered, the court rose to him, the buzz was hushed, the trial proceeded, the King's counsel spoke in reply to learned speeches for the defence on the

first count and the prisoner's own pleading on the second. Nevertheless by whispered word and half-word it was hinted along the bench that his lordship and the prisoner and the pale woman in the gallery were in some dark way connected. The whisper went along the bench so far as the next to his lordship, and there of course stopped. The whisper went back, "Then there'll be no hanging."

The counsel ceased their learned prating. The judge began to charge the jury, unaware that the dozen gentlemen ranged along the wall on his right were narrowly scanning his face, weighing his every word, catching his every glance, trying to collect his very thoughts. He had put aside his misgivings and was again the perfect judge, self-centred, with the proper lawyer-like limitations. His thoughts travelled no farther from the disentanglement of that ravel of evidence than his eye did from the twelve faces turned to him from the jury box. Looking sideways at them he had the back of his wig to the gallery where Fortuna sat, and his summing up, to the surprise of the gentlemen on his right, was unmistakably against the prisoner. Even when he warned the jury that pity for the prisoner's youth was not to influence their verdict, there was no perceptible unstiffening of his judgelike rigidity, and his peroration dwelt upon the unsettled state of the country, the wickedness of treason, the frequency of felony, the need of examples. So by a common judicial injustice the infectiousness of crime was made not a palliation but an aggravation of the offence.

The judge again retired; the jury were led away for the ten-minute consideration of their verdict; the tongues of the judge's assessors were unloosed. Of course they never exceeded a decent hushed volubility. On the whole it was agreed that there was a justifiable cruelty in his lordship's willingness to have so inconvenient a young man out of the way.

The young man himself felt the cruelty of the peroration without conceding the justification, and the sullen grey which had hitherto encoiled a heart all aglow with



resentment began to be flecked with red flashes. The new force worked, and gradually the self-compression which had tyrannized over his emotions gave way. The feeling at his centre, which had been mere feeling without enlargement, spread, and room being now made occupied not only his consciousness but more and more of his faculties, divided itself into units capable of ranking and inward expression as a sequence of ideas, expression which was energized and heightened by what seemed likely rather to confuse and overwhelm, the multiplicity, the almost incompatibility of its objects. There was pity for self and especially for his mother, indignation against a careless father, wrath upon the forswearing of circumstance, a sense of a wasted life, a horror of the crime with which he was charged, a regret for the woodlands where the willow and hazel were already abloom, an arraignment of the whole process of the law, its subtleties, its pomp and frivolities. Which last mood however, as it was most insisted upon by his surroundings, so did it at first engross more than a due proportion of his growing passion. But if one there could have seen into his soul with as easy a discernment as those many could look and divide his nose from his mouth, that one might reasonably have doubted whether those intellectualized emotions would ever find outward expression more than by a red lightning-flash or two of the eyes; whether so much high thinking and deep feeling would not die with the fleshy tissues that were at once their instruments and their prison, or rather pass somehow indeed into the general consciousness by means as obscure as certain, but alas ! not so immediately operative as to help a need like his.

At last the spectators had wearied of staring at the prisoner and his supposed kinsfolk, had wearied of surmise and expectation and begun to talk and think of everyday trifles. Then William Chaworth entered. His tall stature, good looks and best clothes would have made him remarked by the bottom end of that hall at any time, but his entrance was particularly interesting to all the gentlemen at the upper end, who by then knew what

they knew in common. He was aware that their eyes were upon him; in his best company manner he took a pinch of snuff to their faces, especially singling out Lord Byron. That flush on his cheeks may have been partly due to an extra bottle of Madeira, partly to self-consciousness and partly to the anger that helped his honour, but partly at least to a little honest self-applause. He deliberately took such a position that he could see Fortuna, and with a low drop of the hat bowed to her. She did not perceive it, but Mistress Ann did and said:

"Niece, there's your cousin Chaworth down below saluting you."

She awoke out of her concentrated misery as out of a grey overwhelming dream, curtsied to him, hardly knowing what she did or to whom; but she had not returned to the complete possession of her misery when she saw the young man with a yet heightened flush step up to the dock. Her attention as well as her eyes were engaged. She saw him bow to its occupant and distinctly heard him say with no suppression of his voice:

"Cousin, I've done you a damned wrong. I heartily wish you well out of this."

Roland and the larger audience were hardly aware of their surprise before marshalsmen entered ushering back the jury to their box. His eyes and all eyes were now upon them, his thoughts and all thoughts upon their verdict. Chaworth had done more than he thought to do; the shock of that surprise had brought Roland out of the self-absorbed hopelessness that was an almost death to look again upon the faces of living men like a living man. But the judge reappeared. Roland turned and looked up to the gallery. He and his mother exchanged glances, as they had not done since the first moment of his entrance. All his senses were screwed up to their utmost tension. The twelve again answered to their names. Their formal colloquy with the clerk of the arraigns was dry fuel to the fire already well kindled in him.

"Gentlemen, are you all agreed of your verdict?"

"Yes," chorused the jury.

"Who shall say for you?"

"Our foreman," answered they.

"Roland Surety, hold up thy hand. Look on the prisoner. How say you? Is Roland Surety guilty of the high treason and felony whereof he stands indicted or either of them or not guilty?"

"Guilty of both," answered the foreman.

"What goods and chattels, lands and tenements had he at the time of the said high treason and felony committed or at any time since?"

"None to our knowledge."

"Roland Surety, hold up thy hand. Thou hast been indicted of high treason and felony, thou hast thereupon been arraigned, thou hast pleaded thereto not guilty, and for thy trial thou hast put thyself upon God and thy country; which country hath found thee guilty. What hast thou to say for thyself why the court should not proceed to give judgment of death upon thee and award execution according to the law?"

The prisoner rose into his extreme stature, which had hitherto appeared less than it was. He put aside his counsel's remonstrances and spoke with a restrained passion. It was in his mind all along that his mother was listening, though he did not again look her way.

"I have at my tongue's end a like question, my lord, which with your permission I would fain have an answer to."

"Ask on," said his lordship, astonished at the transformation in the culprit.

The gentlemen on either hand twisted their necks to look at the judge, then turned again to the prisoner, comparing, conjecturing, wondering.

"Have you anything to say, you or those men about you, why I should not proceed to give judgment upon you?"

"Sooner or later there will be judgment for me also and for all these men, but for the present, Roland Surety, it is your deeds which are in question; and I warn you that you stand in extreme peril."

"My lord, there's no fear of my forgetting that "

Again his counsel would have persuaded him into a prudent silence, but he persisted.

"My lord, I am as little practised in the art of speaking as the gentlemen on tother side of that table, who have been so eloquent bitter again me, are well practised; but I have my back to the wall and I must out of my terror contrive a kind of courage, for saving mine own tongue I have nothing here to plead for me but my youth, ignorance and innocence; advocates which I do now perceive to be the three weakest in all the world."

There had been a stir of wonder in the court, which was immediately hushed by the marshalsmen. Each man questioned his eyes and ears whether the speaker were really that rustic who had so stolidly occupied the dock during the nearing of the cause. The judge's attention was of all the most troubled with surprise, because of the personal turn which his thoughts took. He could not but recall the time when he too made his first public appearance, when he too had his back to the wall, an unknown\*ambitious young man, and stood up with a ready untaught eloquence to advocate innocence; but another's. Yet if he and the rest are said to have listened, what term shall be used to express how his mother heard and entered into his meaning, to set forth the proud agony of her attention, as she sat with head no longer bowed, one hand clasping Aunt Allcott's left, the other Aunt Ann's right? But the prisoner spoke on.

"As to my innocence, I do affirm it against this terrible accusation of murder. I can but say. I have been told I may not swear myself in; and if you will not allow my oath you will hardly give any weight to my word. My lord, I deny nothing material of what the witnesses have seen and said. What I deny is what none of 'em saw and none of 'em say, that I slew Abel Marrott."

"For that," said the judge, "the jury have relied upon sufficient circumstantial evidence. It is conceded that nobody was present."

"My lord, you seem to deny that God was there. I could wish it otherwise, but have not the present courage

to maintain it again you. It is terrible to be left in the hands of men."

"Nay," quoth the judge, "'twould be unbecoming of me in this place to impugn the existence of God. Of which indeed the most private judgment must allow the great probability."

"Maybe, my lord, but probabilities, great or small, will not save any man; and looking around, my lord, I can't see that you have left room for him anywhere, either on your high seat or at this table or among those twelve men. And you've done your best to warn him out o' this dock. But I am teasing you, even with my great need of your good favour. I will ha' done on that head and come to speak of the other thing—counts I think you call 'em. My lord, I think there should be somebody else here by my side."

The gentlemen on the bench exchanged glances and liftings of the eyebrow across the very person of the judge.

"My lord, I am extreme young to be speaking at such odds of such great matters before such a person. A youth must go as he is led. Friday sennight is the feast of the blessed St. Ambrose, and on that day in the year 1726 I was born; so that in a week and two days, if by your good leave I live so long, I shall only then be twenty years of age. And until lately, my lord, I hain't felt myself to be any older than that reckoning makes me."

His nineteen then was all but twenty! Which might bring his birth within danger of the date on which Oliver Bond parted from Fortuna Chance, if one could only count it coolly back to the exact month. The fluid doubt in the judge's mind congealed to a fear. Questions battered at his gates without getting entrance, much less answer. He was only sure that Lord Macclesfield's trial was in May. He was distracted between the need to think and the need to listen; for the prisoner spoke on without a break.

"As to ignorance, my lord, I was born into it. My father abandoned my mother before I came into the world. Probably if he had acted a father's part I should

have been brought up to respect the present establishment; but by a bad sort of self-murder he died to me and left me ignorance as my sole inheritance."

"Left me ignorance as my sole inheritance!" It was like an echo in the judge's mind of something which he had himself uttered, so exactly did not only the words, the phrasing and intonation but the idea (that is, both the soul and the body of it) correspond with his own turns of thought and forensic expression.

"This ignorance then which you are going to sentence in my person and punish on my body is not mine but my father's. 'Tis he who should be here and I where you are, the accuser, the judge. What is wanting that I should not at once proceed to judgment again him? The proofs? My lord, I am the living proof. Unless you will that I say 'the dying proof.' The long forms and dree documents? My lord, I set justice afore 'em all. The high bench, the gown, the wig? My lord——"

Just then the senior of his learned counsel leant towards the dock and bobbed his head, of which a big old-fashioned wig was the larger part, in the prisoner's face. He was intending to urge his client once more to desist from an irritating expostulation, but it seemed to Roland, out of himself as he was, that the wig for which he had spoken was opportunely offered him. He put forth his hand, took it and set it on his own head. The whole court stood astounded, first at the boldness of the action, then and even more at the remarkable likeness to the bewigged judge which was immediately apparent in the bewigged prisoner. The warders did not interfere, the unwigged barrister looked up in astonishment, the marshalmen had no need to cry silence. To the judge it was as if he saw himself in a glass.

"My lord, do you allow my sufficiency?"

The court's expectancy gaped for his lordship's reply. He said with a good show of sternness:

"Prisoner at the bar, you have not received His Majesty's commission to preside over this court, therefore it is impossible for me to allow your sufficiency."

Unawares he had accepted and repeated the phrase; which enforced to the bystanders' ears the similarity, the almost identity of the judge's with the prisoner's voice, tone, emphasis. It was bewildering. Were there two judges, an ungowned one and a gowned? Or two felons, one at the bar, the other on the bench? The judge read on the faces that fronted him the amazed questioning which distracted his own soul. Only the prisoner preserved his unshaken severity; which made his resemblance to the ideal magistrate the more perfect.

"Who art thou, young man?" cried the judge, not more at his own impulse than by the suggestion of those hundreds of faces around him.

"I know not. I only know that I shall soon be nothing. Ask my mother; she is here."

The judge turned his pale face up to the gallery. "

"Woman, who and whose son is this young man?"

Fortuna had by then got to the other side of all possible emotions; her voice was sternly passionless, and though pitched low it sounded loud to that listening silence.

"None should know better than yourself, my lord; unless it be I."

"Answer categorically; I am in no mood for riddles."

"He is my husband's son, Oliver Bond's son; to be quite plain, your son."

"Thou speakest well, Roland Bond," said the judge; "thy father's place is down there beside thee, since I may not invite thee up hither among these unspotted gentlemen."

Before the hearers' confounded ears had thoroughly grasped the meaning of the judge's words he had risen and disappeared through his private door. Taken by surprise, neither attorney nor barrister, neither clerk of arraigns nor assisting magistrate had paid him the compliment of rising. There was a minute's hush of ear-strained expectancy, then the buzz of an unloosed amazement. Which was frozen back into a hard black silence when presently Oliver Bond entered the court below, pushed through the crowd to the dock, unwigged, unermind, ungowned, and took his stand beside his

son. A warder had removed the wig from Roland's head and returned it to its owner. Except for the young man's ribbon-bound locks and his elder's short-cropped hair there was only such perceivable difference between the two as the odds of years must needs make. In stature, bearing, outline they were a pair. The same horror paled the face and depressed the shoulders of each. There they stood, side by side, amid an unnatural silence, two criminals facing a judgeless bench.

The high sheriff, who had at last risen from his seat beside his lordship's, stood forgetful of his intended activity. Nervous persons looked up, fearing the fall of the ceiling and general catastrophe. Everybody's surmise was asking "What next?" Amid it all, in the dead of the silence, there came from the back of the court a weird chuckle, low pitched and soon suppressed, but for the time being it filled every ear. Until Roland's voice rang out:

"Who laughs there? Seize him! The man who laughed knows who killed Abel Marrott."

There was a stir at the back. A man would have slipped out, a Gipsy-like person with long wild black hair, but the door was fiercely held by a young Gipsy woman. Attention being twitched his way he would fain have appeared unconcerned, but the clamour of twenty voices pointed him out as that strange laugh. He denied it, slightly, earnestly, vehemently.

"I say he was there!" repeated Roland. "I heard him laugh. Judge if I was likely to forget it. Let me see him."

Javelin-men laid hands upon the dark man and pushed him to the front.

"'Tis Ethan the Gipsy!" said Roland. "Ah, at last I find you, Ethan."

With a loud cry Ethan broke away, but was stopped, hemmed in and after a desperate resistance, tooth and nail, overpowered. As soon as he ceased to struggle he went off into a fit. When he recovered, two of the magistrates then in court signed his mittimus and he was led away in custody.



## CHAPTER XXXVII

### VICTRIX VEL VINDEX

MR. JUSTICE BOND refused to return to the bench, resolute in the opinion that one so deeply and publicly accessory to crime as himself could not decently hold the scales of justice for others. Therefore declining a ceremonial return to the judges' lodgings he retired as quietly as might be into private life. Roland was taken back to jail, and it happened that Ethan was being led across the yard at the same time. He was ghastly pale, but stared his enemy in the face with an effrontery between the furious and the ironical.

"Your sarvant, my sweet pretty sugar, gentleman. Glad I am here to see you here, I've that dear precious love for ye. It's that great and mighty that if I can on'y see you fust atween cart and string I'll dance joyful at my own hanging; no minuet, mind ye, this time, but a ranting jig."

"Yo'll jig it," said his warder roughly, "'out o' question; and so will this tother young jail-bird. For if he don't hang for murder he's bound to hang for treason, which is the surest and genteelest road of 'em all up to Gallers Hill."

"Then I'll die laughing like a true Romany chal. Alfa wain't have me and she can't have you. I don't taste no difference there to fight about."

Roland passed on, pale but collected, with other things in mind than the resenting of Gipsy jibes.

"Hoho! you're afeard, my fine Gaujo gentleman. You likes the gen-teel minuet on the solid ground; the randy jig in the air ain't to your Gaujo taste. Lookee! the bold Gipsy lad 'll show ye how 'tis done."

To the chink of his handcuffs Ethan tripped it lightly, jiggishly, riggishily, would-be merrily down to the jail door. Roland gave no sign of seeing, much less admiring or envying the performance. They entered the jail. Roland was led on to his private chamber, where his mother and Alfa awaited him; Ethan was stopped at the entrance to the men's common ward. He looked after his fellow-prisoner and a spasm of pure hate writhed his face, obliterating the skin-deep jollity of his mockery.

He passed the evening in drinking from a bottle of hollands fetched for him by the under-turnkey. When he was well primed he took his fiddle and bow out of a deep pouch in the lining of his cloak, and bought the attendant with a dram to remove his handcuffs for a few minutes while he played. One of the strings was broken but he did without it. As he tuned up and began to play the other criminals gathered round, all but two a broken-hearted debtor and his decent half-starved wife. The jail being a quite new erection attempted among other improvements a separation between the unmarried male and female prisoners. Still it provided a motley assembly of the criminal and the hapless, the young and the old, the well dressed and the squalid, the jovial and the desperate, the condemned and the untried, with two other women, gin-drinking sluts, the wives or mistresses of prisoners. Before that audience, note for note without effort of memory, Ethan went *scherzando* through the rhythmic mazes of the strange dance of death which he had conceived and performed at the "Admiral Anson" on the night of the murder, and with a wilder abandonment, a more derisive pathos, a more desperate mirth, an insaner playfulness and a mockery yet weirder. The listeners generally recognized the dancishness of the music; several began to shuffle their feet, some presently to take one another by the waist and skip outright. One ragged rough-chinned old villain especially entered into the fun of it. He clutched a fellow-prisoner round the middle, and

despite his heavily ironed wrists and ankles frisked it with a grotesque nimbleness. He had been expeditiously condemned to death the day before for coining, and the partner of his dance was a smooth well-dressed youth under the same sentence for filching a sixpenny purse with a shilling in it. The harsh jangle of their chains, the men's and women's coarse laughter mingled with the fluent mock-passion of the strings.

Suddenly, with jag and jerk, the Gipsy ceased playing and left the dancers surprised into dancing on. He put his bow and fiddle under his foot and trod them into splinters. Then he drank to this toast: "—"

"To mine and Roly Surety's merry duetty atop o' Gallers Hill."

He emptied the bottle to "Alfa Lee; may her death be as slow to her as how mine is quick to me." By then, what with the music and the brandy and the despair, he was quite drunk. "I would ha saved his sweet lordship and the pretty hangman so much trouble, but that fool keeper followed me and so got what I meant for the tother."

To this impromptu confession he deliberately added another next day before two magistrates. He made it clear that Abel Marrott's last act was an attempt to save Roland at the expense of his own life.

Baron Prawle took the rest of the Crown cases after the *nisi prius* business, but thought well to defer passing that barbarous sentence of "hanged, drawn and quartered" upon Roland. The young man's innocence of the blacker crime laid to his charge being proved, general sympathy and the influence of his new-found parentage and kindred got him indulgence for the offence which was technically graver, but really little more than a boyish escapade, and the King was graciously pleased to extend his favour to him by a *nolle prosequi*. He married Alfa, and lived with her on an estate purchased for him by his father in Derbyshire half-way between Kirkby and Ashover.

Mr. Bond, having resigned his judgeship, wooed

Fortuna to marriage or remarriage. He saw everything else through, then spoke out. It was the first of October and there had been a sharp frost in the night, the first of the season.

"My lord——" she answered.

The ex-judge reminded her that he had relinquished the title.

"Sir, I have been told and have always believed, that I am married already. Have you anything to say against that?"

No, nothing; nothing utterable. What he had once so passionately declared to be a true marriage he could not then dispute. The trite legalities which in an ordinary way would have flown to meet him were so immediately beaten down by instincts and sensibilities of a stronger wing, that they never left the ground.

"Perhaps you hold that I am a widow?"

"How can I, Fortuna, of all men?"

"Do. anybody?"

"Nobody, if you do not."

"I? Oh, widow is not so pretty a name that I would be the first to give it to myself. Then since I am not a widow, it appears to me that marriage with the man who married me in '25 would be superfluous and with any other man bigamous."

He bowed to her ruling; could do no otherwise. He might neither invite her to make a ceremonious acknowledgment of a past irregularity, nor to live with him in what would have had the appearance to the world of a scandalous intimacy. There was in truth ample excuse for the lawyer's doubt about the validity of their union, but not the lover's. During the assizes Mistress Alliott had taken the opportunity, without her niece's privity, to consult a learned special pleader, a Catholic. The only fixed part of his opinion was a doubt whether there had been sufficient cohabitation. Mistress Alliott delicately hinted the existence of a child. He shook his head, and finally opined that it might amount to a marriage for some purposes if not for others. Being

asked which some and which others, he suggested that the parties might bring a collusive action to settle—or unsettle it. And that was all Mistress Alliott got for her guinea.

On that same October 1st came Master Trivett from Nottingham with the quarterly interest, and Press, after dallying for twenty years, consented to ride behind him to the parsonage at an hour's notice and make a marriage of it. When they returned, she fortified herself with a pinch of snuff on the door-mat, left her husband there and went in to her mistress.

"Prithee, ma'am," she said, and curtsied, "I've two askings to ask you."

"What may they be?"

"The first is that you'll be pleased once to call me Mistress Trivett, so I may tell how I like of it."

"Mistress Trivett, I wish you and Master Trivett joy with all my heart," said Fortuna, and kissed her maid very kindly on each cheek.

"It sounds vilely ancient. So my second asking is that you'll be pleased never again to call me anything but Press. And now, ma'am, 'twas on my tongue's end this morning to bid my poor pennyworth call you Mistress Bond."

"You would have done ill; I am still Mistress Surety, and shall always be."

"You told me last night, ma'am, that——"

But here Press stopped, turned and looked at the door, saw that it had a keyhole, stooped and whispered in Fortuna's ear.

"It holds true, Press," answered Fortuna.

Press knitted her brows at her mistress as if she were trying to read small print.

"Then why not Mistress Bond, ma'am?"

Fortuna sat down and seemed to be choosing. At last she said:

"I am only forty-one."

"And don't hardly seem thirty-one," said Press, "now you have gotten your colour back."

"Forty-one and some odd months. Little hands are strong, Press. I should not like my Roland to be pushed never so little from me."

"Pugh! he's eight mile off a'ready with the push of two full-grown Gipsy hands. If you told me you didn't want to begin again with slobbering-bibs and suck-bottles I could understand it; but it's in my mind, ma'am, as you've deceived me just a-purpose to get rid of me. You've taught me, what I never knew before, how like I am to a fool. And I was thinking, marry come up, to bring some mite of understanding into this precious partnership o' mine."

She went out of the room before Fortuna could answer.

"Where are you going to, my pretty maid?" screamed the parrot after her.

I am afraid that Master Trivett's next quarter of an hour with his bride was a bad one.

Roland too had been misled by his expectation of Fortuna's ambiguous words. He had not doubted that a public avowal of his father's and mother's marriage would immediately ensue upon his own. Disappointed of that, he would fain have had her go and live with him and Alfa or at least take a commodious house near them. To his surprise, somewhat to his displeasure, she refused to do either. He did not consider it a sufficient excuse that her flowers would not bear transplanting. She as firmly and on no better ground declined her aunts' invitation to Ashover.

Mr. Bond rented a farmhouse in Kirkby parish, such as he could get, but very unsuitable as the neighbourhood thought to the dignity of an ex-judge; and it was his daily custom to walk or slowly ride past her cottage, if perchance he might catch a glimpse of her at her window or see her working in her garden or even speak to her over the hedge. She never invited him in, but for many years she never once failed to show herself to him from one place or another. Father and son met but seldom, and I do not think they were ever quite at ease in each other's presence. The remembrance of that trial

and what led up to it would never, I think, be quite out of their minds. The father could hardly help looking on the son as a judge, and the son on the father as something very like the accomplice of his real errors and the suborner of his false accusations.

Fortuna's aunts effected a reconciliation between her brother and her. But she never saw him again; he died ten years later of wounds received at the battle of Leuthen and left her his considerable wealth. Alfa's father perished more obscurely in the Scottish campaign. Roland made every inquiry, but could never learn whether he died of flux or fever or more hero-like by the hand of a fellow-man. All that was known was that Basil Lee no longer answered to his name at the muster of his company.

After five years of such sober bliss as matrimony could afford him Master Trivett departed this life. As soon as he was put underground—buried in woollen as per affidavit—and his affairs settled, his widow drove to the Nook, let herself in, paid the lady's-maid in office her only half-earned yearly wage out of her own pocket, gave her an hour to pack up her alls, and sent her off in the post-chaise in which she herself had arrived. Then she changed her own dress for a waiting-woman's cap, tucker, white linen jacket and petticoat, went in to Fortuna and made her a waiting-woman's curtsy.

"My humble duty to you, ma'am," she said. "I am Widow Trivett now, and at liberty for your service on the same terms as afore."

"You will always have your own way with me, Press," said Fortuna, and threw a bunch of keys on to the table that stood between them.

"Then, ma'am, please to come up to your chamber at once, and I'll curl your hair as it hain't been done of these five years. Your last woman seems to have thought that round-eared caps was doomed to be in for everlasting. And only us waiting-wenchies wear white aprons now. Besides your gown is full plain enough, and the sleeves are a good inch and a half out o' the

fashion. But I promise you, ma'am, you shall have a gown ready for to-morrow's dinner as modish as any at the last birth-night."

At that a little fair-haired child with large dark eyes came from behind Fortuna's hoop, holding the head of a doll in one dimpled hand and the body in the other.

"My humble service to you, little missy," said Press.

"We call her Fortuna," said her mistress. "If the next is a girl I wish her to be called Angel."

The little one walked up to Press, carrying her dolly high in each hand, head and body.

"'Ook !" she sang gravely. "Baby boke !"

"Give baby to Press, Mistress Fortuna," said the waiting woman; "Press'll soon mend her." The doll was confided to her without doubt or delay. "If you please, ma'am, your hair must wait a little while."

Fortuna laughed, saying :

"You have gotten a mistress at last, Press, I can well see."

Mr. Bone aged apace, but still he rode by. Sometimes Fortuna had a little Fortuna with her and sometimes a little Oliver; for whom he now and then brought gifts—Dutch toys, whirligigs, hobby-horses and sugar-plums, as well as watches and trinkets. Once and only once he took the liberty and begged to kiss little Mistress Fortuna. Her grandmother held her above the hedge and he saluted her, hat off, as if she had been the greatest lady in the land. There came however a day at length when he neither walked nor rode. Fortuna made immediate inquiry and learnt that he was dangerously ill. She at once went to his house, took a wife's place and nursed him with all tenderness through a lingering illness. When the end was at hand—she had just given him his last ineffectual dose—he said in the faint whisper of a spent voice :

"Darling, I have been much trouble to you."

"You mean this apothecary's vial business?"

"I mean all, all, from first to last."



"Dear, these six months of wifehood have made up for everything."

"Fortuna, my wife!"

"Oliver, my husband!"

She put her ringed hand upon his, hers so warm and full of life on his so cold and numb, and before she removed it he was dead.

She long survived him, but at last she too died and was buried in the same grave with him in Kirkby churchyard. To the meagre, dateless and, as it were, waiting inscription "Oliver Bond" on the upper part of the tombstone, "Fortuna Bond" was then added below, a timid addition as it was read by most. Only a few eyes perceived that the light-cut scroll-work which united the two names was in the form of a true-lover's-knot.

THE END





